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BLUESKIN:

A Romance of the Past Century.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"BLACK BESS; OR, THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD,"

ETC., ETC.

WITH ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SEVEN ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS.

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On his own and the Publisher's behalf, then, the Author begs to express his warmest thanks for the very unusual amount of support which this Romance has received for so long a period.

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BLUESKIN:

A Romance.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"BLACK BESS; OR THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD."



[JACK SHEPPARD KNOCKS DOWN THE WATCHMAN IN WYCH STREET.]

CHAPTER I.

JACK SHEPPARD IMPRECATES HIS MASTER.—THE FALSE CHARGE.—THE ARREST.

"CURSE you all! Curse you all, I say! My bitterest curses on you! I have borne so far all that you, in the spite and malice of your disposition, could heap upon me without a word, though my heart was full of bitterness all the time! But I will not bear it any longer! It is the last drop that makes the cup run over, and you have

added that drop to-night! Curse you for doing so! Curse you for doing so! Curse you for all the indignities that you have heaped upon me at every opportunity!"

It was with a hoarse voice—clenched hands—and fierce gestures that these words were uttered.

As he finished the speaker stepped out from the shadow of the houses where he had been standing into the centre of the roadway, and shook his fists menacingly at one of the dwellings opposite.

The church of St. Clement Danes, in the Strand, chimed

Nos. 1 and 2.

GRATIS with these Numbers, in Illuminated Wrapper, The COLOURED PICTURE of EDGORTH BESS BEING RESCUED FROM THE MOHAWKS BY COLONEL THORNE.

the hour of three-quarters past eleven. The pleasant, musical sounds arose distinctly on the night air, for at that hour, a hundred and fifty years ago, London was comparatively silent.

All the shops in Wych-street—for it was there the person stood who had given utterance to such terrible words—had been long since closed, and the thoroughfare was dark and deserted.

There was, however, just light enough to reveal a shadowy figure, and the house at which he levelled his imprecations.

It was a common-looking old-fashioned structure, entirely built of wood.

The casements were small, and each story of the house overhung the other.

A signboard reached over the shop-door and window. It was black, and had some hungry-looking white letters painted upon it.

They stood out boldly from the background, and read as follows:—

“JOHN ROOTS, CARPENTER AND JOINER.”

From one or two of the other houses in the street a faint beam of light issued from some of the upper windows, but the house we have specified, as well as those on either side of it, was in profound darkness. There was not the dimmest ray to show that they were inhabited.

But, hark! The strange figure in the roadway, as he looks up at the dark and silent habitation, speaks again.

His voice has a solemn and sepulchral tone as he utters that which may be construed into a warning.

“Beware! John Roots, beware! for the day of reckoning will surely come! It is I—Jack Sheppard—your ill-treated apprentice, who speaks—who curses you from the bottom of his heart, yet bids you beware! You have driven me from your house into the streets, penniless—a beggar! Beware of the result! My disposition is, as you say, an evil one! Granted that it is! But you, as my spiritual as well as worldly master, should have tried to make me better! How have you done so? Ha! ha! How have you done so? You have reviled me—degraded me—treated me like a dog! Was that the way to improve what you are pleased to call an evil disposition? No, John Roots, you know it is not—but the way to make bad worse! You have succeeded, and will succeed, no doubt; but, if you do, then I say again, Beware! beware! for, sooner or later, the hour will arrive when you will have to answer for your treatment of me! And then, when that time comes, tremble and beware! You have made me an outcast, have driven me into the path of crime, and the consequences of your actions be upon your own head!”

He paused, breathless and exhausted from the violence of his emotions.

He had drawn himself to his full height, and looked around him defiantly, and if any one had been near enough to observe his countenance, they would have seen upon it an expression of deep determination.

Jack Sheppard was at this period just over twenty years of age.

He was short, and very slightly made; indeed, he is best described by the word diminutive.

But, thin and fragile as he at first sight looked, a second glance would show he was of that wiry sort which is endowed with great bodily strength and uncommon powers of endurance.

His head was small and bullet-shaped.

His features were delicate and regular, but marred by the sharp cunning look which they invariably bore.

It would seem by his manner that he anticipated what he had said would call forth some notice from the house of Mr. Roots, but it did not; all remained just as it was before.

He ground his teeth with disappointment.

No doubt he would have felt it to be a solace if he could have returned his master some of the abuse, which, according to his account he had heaped upon him.

But though there was no one to listen to him, he spoke; the angry passions that were tumulting in his breast would not suffer him to continue silent.

“Ha! he! you sleep now—sleep soundly! What care you for the poor boy who was delivered into your keeping? Nothing! He may beg, starve, steal, anything! You

care not. But you shall care! Yes, as surely as there is a Heaven above me, I will make you care! I swear it! and I will keep my oath!”

A sudden and piercing gust of wind swept down the street at this moment, and Jack was fain to draw his scanty clothing still closer around his person.

Then the many churches in the old sleeping city pealed forth the hour of midnight.

One after another did the clocks commence striking, and it was full five minutes before the last chime died away.

“So late!” ejaculated Jack. “I will begone. It is folly to stay here and imprecate a senseless building! Would that I could see you once again, John Roots, for, if you held open to me your door in peace, I feel that I could forget the past, and enter. Enter and be saved!”

These last words were uttered in a sad, half-repentant tone, and there is no question that if a hand had been held out to him, he would have suffered himself to be led in the right direction.

But it was not so to be.

Scarcely had the words left his lips, than one of the windows of the house in which John Roots dwelt was thrown violently open.

It swung back against the wall with a loud crash.

A face was projected from it.

It looked strangely forbidding in that darksome street.

“John Roots!” exclaimed Jack, involuntarily, as he recognised the countenance of his master.

A harsh, disagreeable, grating voice now spoke.

“Oh! it’s you, you young scoundrel, is it? What do you mean, you gallows whelp? I’ll have you put in jail, I will! Didn’t I tell you never to come near my house again, you thief? What do you mean by coming and standing in the street at twelve o’clock at night, and cursing me in that style? Take that!”

John Roots threw some heavy object from the window at his apprentice.

Jack saw it coming, and he ducked his head.

It passed him by a hair’s breadth.

In his rage, and seeing nothing else at hand, Jack’s master had seized the looking-glass that was on his table, and hurled it at Sheppard’s head.

It came down with a terrific smash on to the stones, and broke into a thousand pieces.

They flew about in every direction.

The angry passions which had a home in Jack’s heart, flamed up like a torch.

He drew himself once more up to his full height.

The foam of passion was on his lips.

“John Roots!” he said, in wild, screaming tones, “listen to me! You have called me a thief! Heaven knows I am not one yet, but I know not how soon I may be! Once more I curse you! Curse you from the bottom of my heart! You shall yet live to repent your treatment of me, for I will have my revenge upon you!”

“Ha—ha!”

“You may laugh, John Roots, you may laugh, and affect to despise what I say! The day will come when you will wish you had rather thrust your hand into a furnace than treated me as you have! My father died at Tyburn, I know full well! But I was a child then, unable even to speak! How, then, could I help what he did? Could I control his actions? Why should the stigma of his guilt be fixed upon my character? It has done so, John Roots! It has done so! No one knows that better than yourself! When, I wonder, did you let slip an opportunity of taunting me with it? Even when we were in the presence of those whose good wishes and sympathies I was anxious to obtain? Never, John Roots, never! It is that which has always preyed upon my mind, and could I help it doing so? It is that which has soured my temper, filled my breast with angry passions, and made me sullen and morose! It is your fault, and I curse you for it? curse you a thousand times! Well, full well, you know that I am innocent of the theft which you, in the malevolence of your heart, accused me of! I would have scorned to have taken anything of yours! I am not guilty, John Roots, but, through your representations, many believe I am! For all this, as well as for your conduct on this night, will I take a terrible and bitter vengeance!”

“Begone, villain,” shouted Mr. Roots, as soon as he had a chance of making himself heard; for the rapidity

with which Jack Sheppard had poured forth this torrent of passionate invective had precluded all ideas of interruption. "Begone, villain! begone, I say. Come no more near my house. Begone at once! I will not be cursed and abused thus in the open street by such as you. I tell you you are a thief! The gallows is imprinted on your face, and to it you will surely come at last!"

Jack tried to utter the passionate words that sprang to his lips, but he could only give utterance to an inarticulate howl of rage.

"Here, here: stop that, if you please! stop that! People can't be woke up out of their blessed sleep by the likes of you. Stop it, or it will be the worse for you!"

As these words were spoken in a wheezing, gasping sort of voice, Jack felt himself clutched tightly round the throat by some one behind him, who had stolen unawares upon the scene.

CHAPTER II.

GIVES THE READER SOME IDEA OF THE MANNER IN WHICH JONATHAN WILD CARRIED ON BUSINESS.

NEXT door to Newgate!

That was where Jonathan Wild lived.

Jonathan Wild, the great!

That extraordinary man, who combined so skilfully and well those two seemingly antagonistic occupations, thief, and thief-taker.

The house which he inhabited adjoined the prison-wall.

Gloomy—rambling—dilapidated.

Those three words contain the essence of a description of its appearance without and within.

We are really sorry, for the sake of our readers, that this house is no longer in existence.

We are quite sure if it was, they would, one and all, at the very first opportunity, take a stroll along Newgate-street, and have a good look at it.

It would have amply repaid them for their trouble.

Unfortunately, the house was burned down to the ground nearly a hundred and fifty years ago.

Our readers will, therefore, be deprived of the pleasure of seeing it with any other eyes than those of their imagination.

Should, however, they feel sufficient interest in the matter to go and look at the spot on which it stood, they will be able to form a tolerable idea of its size, from the fact that three large houses have since been built upon the ground it occupied.

At precisely twelve o'clock noon, on Monday, the tenth day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and twenty-one, Jonathan Wild entered one of the rooms in his mansion, and slammed the door behind him.

This room he facetiously designated as his "office."

Why we know not, for only a small portion of his business was conducted there.

It was a low-ceilinged, dingy-looking room at the back of the house, and very scantily furnished.

The floor was bare.

So were the walls.

One window only was in the room, and that was so incrustated with dirt, and festooned with the cobwebs of industrious spiders, who had gone on year after year spinning away undisturbed, that but a very small and insufficient quantity of daylight found its way in.

There was, however, one inquisitive sunbeam who used, with praiseworthy perseverance, to try for about an hour every day to take a peep at the interior of Wild's office, but he always had to give up the attempt in disgust.

But, although he had been baffled some hundreds of times, he did not relinquish the hope of gratifying his curiosity, but renewed the attack every day—that is, when the envious clouds would let him—until at last it grew into quite a settled habit.

On this particular morning, however, the curious sunbeam found the atmosphere in the yard at the back of Wild's house so clear and free from smoke that he resolved to make one last and desperate effort to accomplish his purpose.

He succeeded, and actually had the audacity, when Wild entered the office, to look the great thief-taker full in the face.

Jonathan winked and blinked like an owl.

But Wild was too full of thought that morning to take much notice of the intrusion of a prying sunbeam into his sanctum.

He merely gave a zoological sort of snarl.

Then he seated himself at his desk, along the front of which was a row of little wooden railings placed about half-an-inch apart.

Just in the middle, three or four of these railings had been knocked out, leaving an opening large enough to allow of a hand being passed through it.

This desk divided the office into two portions, and was so placed that, as Jonathan sat at it, the window was behind him.

An advantageous arrangement in two respects.

Whoever stood in front of this desk had his face to the light, so that Wild could narrowly watch every expression of it, and form an estimate of how far the person who stood before him was speaking the truth.

But those who were thus scrutinized could not scrutinize Wild in return. Oh! no. As he sat with his back to the grimy window, his face was in deep shadow.

Wild settled himself on his stool.

He took off his hat, and deliberately laid it down on the desk.

Then, with a very peculiar twitch, he pulled his dirty white wig over his forehead and eyebrows.

This gave him a very remarkable appearance, and added to his natural ugliness in no small degree.

It was one of Wild's little eccentricities to endeavour to make himself look as hideous as he possibly could.

We give him credit for succeeding in his efforts.

His face could never have been a very handsome one but now it was seamed and scarred by the numerous wounds he had received.

This done, Wild produced from the side pocket in his coat a short, thick bludgeon.

At the end at which it was held it was just large enough to be gripped firmly, while it swelled out gradually until at the top it was between three and four inches in circumference.

This upper part had been hollowed out, and then filled up again with about two pounds of lead.

It was a most murderous weapon.

Jonathan looked at it, and as he did so his mouth expanded into a grin of extreme satisfaction.

He laid it across his hat with great care. To have seen him one would have thought it was made of the most fragile materials.

That bludgeon was Jonathan's pet. He had made it with his own hands.

It was his inseparable companion.

The smile of complacency with which he regarded it gave place presently to a peculiar cackling noise.

He rubbed his hands slowly over one another, only interrupting that operation to give his wig another twitch.

(One of his intimate associates would have known how to translate these movements.)

Wild was pleased!

And that was the strange way he had of showing it.

Such a complicated scheme of villainy, hatched from his fertile brain, had doubtless come to a successful issue.

Tap—tap.

Some one knocked very deferentially with his knuckles upon the office door.

Wild gave his wig such a twitch that it got completely reversed, and the tail hung down most ludicrously over his forehead.

"Come in," he growled.

The door was opened about six inches, and a man put his head into the apartment.

"Mr. Wild, sir," said a voice in very respectful tones.

"If you please, Mr. Wild, sir!"

"Ya—ah! What is it?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild. Pinching Tom, if you please, sir!"

"What are you grinning at, you villain? Tell me at once, or—ya—ah!"

Wild seized his cudgel and shook it menacingly.

"I, Mr. Wild? I grin in your presence, sir?" said the man, whose fancy had been tickled by the way Jonathan had twitched his wig. "No, Mr. Wild, sir! I hopes as I knows myself and you know me too well to think of doing such a thing for a moment, sir!"

Jonathan scowled at the man for a moment, but as the man looked perfectly grave, he added—

"Begone wretch! Tell Pinching Tom to come in."

The man, who was one of those belonging to Wild's gang, withdrew his head and closed the door.

Then he went through some remarkable pantomimic evolutions, caused by the endeavour to laugh heartily, without allowing the sounds of mirth to escape from his lips.

He distended his cheeks until one would have thought the skin would have given way, and for so long that he grew first red, then purple, then black in the face.

He waved his arms in the air.

His legs, which were long and thin, cut the most fantastic capers imaginable.

But he was destined to receive a summary punishment for thus indulging in clandestine laughter.

No sooner did the door shut than Wild took up his cudgel, and, with the stealthiness and silence of a cat, got down off his stool.

On tiptoe he crept across the floor.

With the greatest imaginable caution he slowly turned the handle of the door, and opened it a little way.

Then he saw the man in the attitudes we have described.

He opened the door a little wider, and waited.

Waited until he imagined his officer's jocularly had reached its culminating point.

Whack!—thud!

With two just such sounds did Wild's pet come down on the back of the unfortunate officer.

Of course, no one could stand up after receiving two such sudden and unexpected blows, so the officer fell to the ground at once.

"Murder!—murder! Oh! Mr. Wild!—Mr. Wild! please, sir! No, sir!" he yelled, as he writhed about on the floor.

Jonathan was quite delighted, and so overcome with his own cleverness, that he actually laughed aloud.

An essentially brutal disposition was Jonathan Wild's, and nothing afforded him greater pleasure than inflicting pain upon others.

It had grown with him.

When a boy he was always playing some diabolical trick, and torturing any living creature that was unfortunate enough to get into his clutches.

Now he tortured human beings.

"Oh! Mr. Wild—Mr. Wild, sir! Oh! if you please, you've broken my back! Oh! murder! murder!"

"Get up!" said Wild. "Get up! I hope it will prove a lesson to you! Get up at once, I say, or you shall have some more!"

"No, Mr. Wild, please don't! Mercy! I am getting up, Mr. Wild! I am, indeed!"

With many contortions of his body, and groans and lamentations, the officer rose to his feet.

He stood in a doubled-up sort of fashion.

The blows were doubtless severe, for Wild had dealt them with the whole strength of his arm.

The officer had much ado to stifle the yells that rose to his lips; he knew he did not dare give utterance to them, or if he had, that he would have received some further ill usage.

"Ya-a-ah!" said Wild, in a voice like a hyena's. "Laugh again, Tonks! laugh again! Ha! ha! why, it's quite funny! Tonks, you villain, why don't you laugh! ha! ha! You don't half take a joke! ha! ha!"

Tonks distorted his mouth, but he looked about as unamirthful as any one well could.

"Ha! ha! That's right, Tonks! that's right! Try it again on the other side of your face, and then tell Pinching Tom I am waiting to see him."

Glad of the chance to escape, Tonks hobbled off to the hall, where Jonathan's visitor was waiting, while the thief-taker resented himself at his desk, and prepared to receive him.

CHAPTER III.

PINCHING TOM AND THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.—WILD DOES A CAPITAL MORNING'S WORK.

PINCHING TOM was one of the most enterprising and successful members of that large community of thieves who looked up to Jonathan Wild as their chief.

Scarcely had the great thief-taker adjusted himself and composed his face a little, than Pinching Tom entered.

There was not much respect visible in the way he walked up to the desk, and looked through the little gap in the railings.

But he had an eye to business and dispatch.

He dived his hand into his pocket, and produced a magnificent diamond necklace, such only as one of very high rank could wear, and worth probably some thousands of pounds.

"Here's a sparkler, Johnnty!" he said, as he laid the bauble on the desk. "What do you think of that, eh?"

Wild glared at the speaker.

In common with those base spirits who find or conceive themselves to be in an elevated position, Jonathan had a very exaggerated idea of the importance of his situation, and of the amount of deference that ought to be paid him.

Hence he was deeply offended at the manner in which Pinching Tom had chosen to speak to him.

But Wild never allowed his anger to interfere with his interests.

The diamond necklace, he saw at a glance, was a very valuable booty.

He dissembled.

He stretched out his hand and took the necklace.

It underwent a close examination.

"You needn't be so blessed particular," said Pinching Tom. "There's no paste about that!"

Wild growled.

"Hold your row, will you?" he said. "How much do you want for this kickshaw?"

He flung it negligently upon the desk as he asked this question, but he took good care it should fall where, if Tom felt ever so inclined to take possession of it again, he would find it beyond the reach of his fingers.

"Well," said he, in reply, "it's rather hard to estimate. You see that is a kind of heirloom, or what-you-call-it."

"Bah!"

"It is, indeed, and belongs to Lady Ingestrie."

"Lady Ingestrie! the deuce it does!"

Wild took up the necklace, and it underwent a second examination.

Pinching Tom grew impatient.

"Come, come, Mr. Wild," he said, "this here ain't business, by no means. How much will you give me for it? I needn't tell you that Lord Ingestrie will be here before the day is out and he will give a good sum to have it back again."

"Ya-ah!"

We use these letters to express the wild beast sort of noise Wild made when anything was not just agreeable to him.

"Fifty pounds," said Jonathan.

Pinching Tom looked aghast.

"Fifty pounds?" he repeated.

"Yes. Here you are."

Wild produced a bulky pocket-book, and began to rummage over its contents.

"No, I'm blest if I do! Why, Johnnty, you must be clean off it to offer me fifty pounds for a necklace worth five thousand. It really isn't enough, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan reflected, or rather appeared to do so.

"Well, Tom," he said, at length, "you are a good hand, and deserve to be encouraged. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll sacrifice my own profit, and give you a hundred pounds for it."

"Confound you for a downright rascal!" said Pinching Tom. "You won't let a fellow live, you won't. I leaves you at once. Give me the necklace back again, I'm off!"

Jonathan looked at him with one eye.

"Are you, indeed?"

"Yes, you come it too strong! I shouldn't mind taking a small sum, because you save all the trouble, but I won't part with a valuable thing like that for nothing. Give it us back."

Tom made a sudden grab at the diamond necklace, but Jonathan had put it just out of the reach of his fingers.

"Ya-ah—ya-ah! Will you take the hundred pounds, Tommy?"

"No, never! I"—

"Very good—very good. Hi! hi! Blue! Blue!" shouted Wild, banging the desk all the while with his cudgel.

"What are you kicking up that 'ere row for?" asked Tom.

Wild did not reply, but fixed his eyes upon the door, which, in obedience to his summons, was quickly opened, and Jonathan's lieutenant, Blueskin, came in.

"Hullo!" he said, gruffly. "What's the fly?"

"C. 7," replied Wild.

"Oh! ah! all right. Come on, Tom."

With a dexterity upon which Blueskin prided himself excessively, he slipped a pair of handcuffs on to Tom's wrists.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Pinching Tom, who was, for a second or so, too much astounded to speak.

"What's your game?"

Wild smiled grimly.

"Will you take the hundred pounds, Tommy, or will you pay a visit to Little Newgate?"

"Little Newgate?"

"Yes; you've heard of such a place, I daresay, Tom," said Blueskin. "Little Newgate! That's the name for the cellars under Mr. Wild's house, where he puts any cove that don't act up to the square."

"Will you take the hundred pounds, Tommy?" said Wild, again. "I'm sure you'd better."

"I can't do it, Mr. Wild, because"—

"Oh! all right, then. Off with him, Blue, to C. 7."

Pinching Tom commenced a violent struggle. He was not exactly the sort of man to lose his liberty without making an effort to retain it.

But it availed him nothing. In Blueskin's grasp he was like a child in the hands of a giant.

Jonathan gripped his cudgel and got down off his stool.

"Stash it! stash it, Tom, or it will be the worse for you."

"Give me the hundred pounds, then, and let me be off!"

"Shan't! Ya-a-ab! You should have had it while I was in the humour! No—no! Let me see, to-day is Monday. All right. The case is clear against you, and will come on on Friday. Off with him, Blue!"

But Tom, who now became fully aware of the perilous situation in which he was, began to struggle as a man only can struggle when he finds his life depending upon it.

"Take that, then!" said Jonathan, bringing his pet down with great violence upon Tom's head. "Take that, and be hanged!"

But provident nature had bestowed upon Pinching Tom a thicker skull than it falls to the lot of general humanity to have, so the blow only staggered him.

Still it confused his faculties, and made him incapable of offering much resistance.

Blueskin caught hold of his arm and led him out into the gloomy passage belonging to Wild's house.

At the extremity of this hall, and opposite the front door, was a strong iron grating.

A man stood at it with a key, and when he saw Blueskin and the prisoner, he flung the grating open and allowed them to pass.

A flight of steps was next descended, and then another very massive door was opened and closed after them.

They were in a long dimly-lighted corridor.

Doors were on both sides of it.

Each one was strongly made, and had a figure painted upon it.

Blueskin stopped before one which was numbered 7.

He unlocked it by means of a key which he took from his pocket.

"In you go, Tom!" he said. "Take care!"

He gave him a sudden push, which caused poor Tom, who certainly had been very badly used, to fall on his face in the cell.

Blueskin did not trouble about that little circumstance, but banged the door shut, and fastened it again.

Wild was waiting for him in the passage.

"He's safe!" said Blueskin, laconically.

A succession of loud knocks came at this moment upon the front door of Wild's house.

Jonathan retreated to his office.

He, however, stood just within the threshold.

He was anxious to know who it was that had come with such a noisy summons for admittance.

"Open the door, Blue! Look sharp! If it's anyone on business I'm at home."

Jonathan heard Blueskin saunter to the door and open it, just as the knocking was renewed for the second time, and with greater violence than before.

"Hullo!"

That was Blueskin's mode of greeting everybody.

"Is this Mr. Wild's, the thief-taker's?"

"Rather! Is it business?"

"Yes."

"All right, then! Come in! Mr. Wild's at home."

"I will tell his lordship."

"Eh?"

"I say I will tell his lordship."

"Oh! his lordship wants to see Mr. Wild?"

"Yes."

"Lord who?"

"Ingestrie."

Wild heard the footman's feet descend the steps.

He poked his head out into the hall.

"Blue, you villain! Blue! Mind how you speak to his lordship."

"You be hanged! Here he comes."

Jonathan dashed precipitately into his office as he heard some one enter.

He jumped on his stool.

There lay the diamond necklace about which Lord Ingestrie had doubtless come to make some inquiries.

Wild only had just time to cover it over with his hat and lay his cudgel across it, when the office-door opened, and Blueskin, with an obsequious bow, ushered Lord Ingestrie into the sanctum of the great thief-taker.

Jonathan gave his wig one of his most ferocious twitches.

"Good morning, your lordship," he said, in servile tones; "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you this morning?"

"Well, Mr. Wild, it is a little affair I wish you to manage for me."

"I am quite at your lordship's service," said Wild, giving his wig another twitch. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, the fact is, Lady Ingestrie, on her way home from the Countess of Wiltshire's rout, was, in some inexplicable way, robbed of a diamond necklace."

"Dear me!" said Wild, with an assumption of great interest and curiosity, "How singular!"

"The necklace itself, you must understand," continued his lordship, "is intrinsically worth a very large sum, besides which, it has been in the possession of the family for many generations."

"Pinching Tom was right," muttered Jonathan. "What an idiot he was not to be civil to me!"

"What do you say, Mr. Wild?"

CHAPTER IV.

JACK SHEPPARD Baffles the Watchman, and Takes Refuge at the "Black Lion," in Drury Lane.

JACK SHEPPARD wrenched his head round with a violent effort, and found himself face to face with a watchman.

"That's right!" cried Mr. Roots, "That's right! Hold him tight—the vagabond!—or else he will escape."

"All right, your honour!" said the watchman, taking a firmer grip, "I'll settle him. You shall be provided with a comfortable night's lodging, and nothing to pay! Come along, now, will you?"

"Let go your hold!" said Jack, fiercely. "Let go, or you will find it all the worse for you. Loose, I say!"

"No, no," exclaimed Jack's master. "Lock him up! I give him in charge for threatening to take my life! To the watch-house with him! I will appear against him in the morning."

"Very good, Mr. Roots. It shall be done, sir. You'd best not be obstreperous! Take my advice, and come along quietly."

"Never!" said Jack, struggling fiercely to release himself, "never, I say! I tell you you had better let me go! I don't want to harm you; but if you will have it, I can't help it. Once more I say, let me go!"

"I desay! Is there anything else you'd like? because just say the word while you are about it."

Scarcely had the words left his lips, than by a sudden exertion of strength, which no one would have given him credit for, Jack freed himself from the watchman's grasp.

"Help! help! An escape!" yelled the guardian of the night. "Help! help!"

He sprung his rattle furiously.

Then he made a sudden dart at Jack, who clenched his fist, and throwing all his weight into the blow, struck the watchman in the face.

No human being could have stood up against a blow given with so much suddenness and force.

Down went the watchman, bludgeon, lantern, and rattle, making a terrible clatter.

But the watchmen on the contiguous beats had been aroused, and were hurrying to the spot.

Taking, apparently, no notice of the circumstance, Jack again addressed his master.

"John Roots," he said, "it is you who will have to answer for this night's work, and for what it may produce. I own I have been wrong, but at the same time, you have been wrong also. Had you, to-night, have given me a word of kindness, I should once more have crossed your threshold. I should have returned to my work, and become an honest man! But you would not have it so! You have driven me forth! You have thrown again my father's fate into my teeth! You have called me a vagabond and a thief! Farewell, John Roots; but the last word I shall utter shall be, beware! I have sworn to be revenged! Beware! beware!"

All this was spoken with extraordinary volubility, and when he finished, Jack did not pause a moment longer, but dashed down a narrow court on the opposite side of the way.

With hurried footsteps and loud cries, the watchmen coming down the street in both directions, reached the spot where their companion lay prostrate on the stones.

Rage and fear were swelling within the bosom of John Roots, and as soon as he could command his passion sufficiently to speak, he cried—

"Quick! quick! After him! Down Rose-court he went! Lock him up. I will appear against him in the morning."

Upon hearing this, the watchmen, leaving their brother to recover as he best could, dashed forward in a body down Rose-court.

But when they reached its termination, there was no one to be seen. The place was silent, and all the houses closed.

There was no outlet to this court, it being, in fact, what is generally called a blind alley.

The watchmen, by the aid of their lanterns, made a thorough search, which resulted in nothing.

The mystery of Jack's evanishment is easily explained.

From living on the spot he was, of course, familiar with the locality, and he knew well enough there was no outlet to Rose-court; and it was upon that knowledge that he built the hope of escape.

On the right hand side of the court, and not half-a-dozen steps from Wych-street, was a side door into one of the houses.

It was a large, roomy doorway, and Jack pressed himself as closely as he could against the door post.

The watchmen were all intently looking before them, so Jack's hiding-place was not even seen by them.

Even if they had seen it—looked into it even—it is questionable whether they would have seen him, so closely did he press his slim figure against the woodwork.

No sooner had they passed him than Jack slipped out again into Wych-street.

He did not pause, however; for he saw that his master had not withdrawn from the window, and that the watchman he had knocked down was beginning to recover his consciousness.

He walked silently along the street, taking care to keep as much in the shadow of the houses as possible.

When he reached the corner of Newcastle-street he came to a halt.

He leaned against the post at the corner.

A revulsion of feeling took place.

He spoke, but it was in gentle and tristful accents.

"What shall I do?" he said. "Where shall I go? What will become of me? I am quite alone in the world! I am kin to no one—there is no one who loves me."

He bowed his head upon his arm, and, as the utter loneliness of his position forced itself upon him, he wept aloud.

But not for long did he continue this childish expression of grief.

With the back of his hand he dashed the teardrops from his eyes.

"I will not be a woman, though," he said. "Not a woman! This must be fate—destiny! I will go on and see for what I am destined."

He left the post, and continued his way, until he at length entered Drury-lane.

Straight before him was a house, from the basement windows of which there issued a bright light.

All the rest of the street was in darkness.

Some impulse, which he did not strive to combat or reflect upon, caused him to direct his steps towards this house.

He knew it well.

It was a public-house.

The sign was the "Black Lion."

A very bad name had the "Black Lion" got. It was famed all over London as being a thieves' house.

Yet no steps were taken by the authorities to have it closed.

The theory of the suppression of crime by prevention was not started for many a year afterwards.

The principle then was to wait until an offence against the law was consummated, and then look after and punish the offender.

Generally by death.

Hence the police-officers rather encouraged such houses as the "Black Lion" than otherwise, for knowing this was a place to which fugitives from justice resorted, they were often able, by entering unawares, to make an important capture.

The shutters were never put up at the "Black Lion."

Jack crossed the street with a slow step, and looked in at one of the windows of the public-house.

That is, he tried to do so, for the dingy-looking blind, which had been drawn down, made such an occupation rather difficult.

The bright light, which filled the apartment into which he thus peeped, proceeded chiefly from the fire, which was a very large one, and piled high up above the hobs.

Several people, male and female, were seated there.

They all seemed happy, and enjoying themselves to the top of their bent.

A sigh came to Jack's lips.

The room seemed twice as comfortable as it really was, when compared with the street without, and the forlorn state in which he was seemed to grow more forcibly upon him.

The temptation to enter was strong—in fact, he only held back from the dread that he, a stranger, might not be very favourably received by the lawless company.

Jack could hear, with tolerable distinctness, what was going on inside.

"Now, Joe Blake," he heard a voice say, "just troll us a ditty."

The proposition was evidently relished by the rest of the company, that is, if the tremendous banging of jugs and mugs upon the table, was any criterion.

"H—m, ladies and gentlemen," Jack heard a voice say, though he could not see the speaker, "what shall it be?"

"Oh! 'Friends together!'" was the unanimous cry.

"We can all join in that."

"Very good, friends all!—here goes!"

There was something so peculiarly droll about the song, that Jack could not move until he had heard the whole of it.

"Now, friends!" said the voice which had been asked to sing, and which Jack identified as Joe Blake's, "order, I'm ready."

There was an immediate silence.

Joe Blake, then, much to Jack's surprise, repeated the first two lines of his song in a solemn voice, just as in many churches and chapels the first lines of a hymn are given out to the congregation.

The two lines were—

"Friends together we have met,
In spite of all our foes."

"Now!" said Joe Blake, "join in, ladies and gentlemen, please."

The whole of the company then sang the words given out to a jovial tune, and to the following refrain :—

Friends together we have met,
We have met,
We have met,
Friends together we have met,
In spite of all our foes.

Then Joe Blake repeated the two next lines—

"And he that would our mirth obstruct,
We'll take him by the nose."

"Now!"

And he that would our mirth obstruct,
O r mirth obstruct,
Our mirth obstruct,
And he that would our mirth obstruct,
We'll take him by the nose.

"Sure he must be some scoundrel dog,
That would our mirth obstruct."

"Now!"

Sure he must be some scoundrel dog,
Some scoundrel dog,
Some scoundrel dog,
Sure he must be some scoundrel dog,
That would our mirth obstruct.

"We'll take him to some large horsepond,
And have him soundly ducked."

"Now!"

We'll take him to some large horsepond,
Some large horsepond,
Some large horsepond,
We'll take him to some large horsepond,
And have him soundly ducked.

"And when we've had him soundly ducked,
And all these steps are taken,"

"Now!"

And when we've had him soundly ducked,
Him soundly ducked,
Him soundly ducked,
And when we've had him soundly ducked,
And all these steps are taken,

"We'll send him up the chimney-top,
And dry him there for bacon."

"Now!"

We'll send him up the chimney-top,
The chimney-top,
The chimney-top,
We'll send him up the chimney-top,
And dry him there for bacon.

"But if the devil he should come,
And think this night to have us."

"Now!"

But if the devil he should come,
He should come,
He should come,
But if the devil he should come,
And think this night to have us.

"We will persuade him if we can,
To go away and leave us."

"Now!"

We will persuade him if we can,
If we can,
If we can,
We will persuade him if we can,
To go away and leave us.

"But if he'll not lere* handed go,
And we should be mistaken."

"Now!"

But if he'll not lere handed go,
Lere handed go,
Lere handed go,
But if he'll not lere handed go,
And we should be mistaken,

"We'll send him up the chimney-top,
And bid him take the bacon."

"Now!"

We'll send him up the chimney-top,
The chimney-top,
The chimney-top,
We'll send him up the chimney-top,
And let him take the bacon.

* An old English word, meaning empty.

Now devil's gone and bacon too,
What need have we to fear?"

"Now!"

Now devil's gone and bacon too,
And bacon too,
And bacon too,
Now devil's gone and bacon too,
What need have we to fear?"

"We'll drown our cares in brandy strong,
Good wine and Johnson's cheer."

"Now!"

We'll drown our cares in brandy strong,
In brandy strong,
In brandy strong,
We'll drown our cares in brandy strong,
Good wine and Johnson's cheer.

The applause that succeeded this song was deafening and tremendous.

There was something very peculiar in this song, given out first two lines together, and then sang.

Jack Sheppard could not help feeling amused, although his heart was heavy.

"What fascination holds me here?" thought Jack. "I feel as though I was compelled to enter this place, and somehow I have no fear of the reception I shall meet with. I cannot stay here; I will go in."

As he spoke these words, Jack Sheppard left the window, and passing through the front door of the "Black Lion," and traversing a sanded passage, entered the large room where the company were assembled.

He did not know it; but he had put his foot upon the first round of the ladder of crime.

CHAPTER V.

JOE BLAKE, ALIAS BLUESKIN, GIVES JACK SHEPPARD A HEARTY WELCOME.

"BRAVO! bravo! Hurrah! Another glass, landlord! Hi! hi! Capital! capital! Well sung! Again! Bravo! Blake! Here—here! Johnson, one more bowl of your prime punch! Let's sing it over again! Now, Joe, strike up! First-rate! The best song out! Them as can't sing can join in! Now, then, over again—over again! Go it, Blake! Bring in all the lush, Johnson, my boy, and then we won't be interrupted! Bravo! bravo!"

Such were the words, uttered in every imaginable key, which separated themselves from the murmur of voices, the banging of jugs and glasses upon the tables, the thousand and one noises which arise from a tumultuous assembly, and reached the ears of Jack Sheppard confusedly, as he stood irresolutely two or three steps within the room.

The bright light which filled the place, and the rude boisterous clamour of its occupants, blinded and deafened him, and he sank, with a feeling of perfect bewilderment, upon a vacant seat which happened to be close to him.

He acted like one who is vaguely conscious that he is doing something and nothing more.

His intrusion was scarcely noticed, except by those next to him, and they simply honoured him with a long stare.

But Jack soon began to recover himself.

Observing near him a stout serving wench, who was assisting in the performance of the waiter's duties, he called for a glass of hot brandy-and-water.

The steaming spirit was in a few moments placed before him, and he tossed off the largest half or it at one gulp.

Its effect was instantaneous.

He became confident and composed.

Although, from living so long in the neighbourhood, he was acquainted with the outside of the "Black Lion," yet he had never before beheld its interior, and he looked about him with some curiosity.

The room in which he was sitting was low pitched, but spacious, and tables were arranged in it in such a manner that a large number of guests might find accommodation in the shape of seats.

But as Jack glanced rapidly around the place, his eyes soon lighted on an object which filled him with wonder and surprise.

It was the countenance of the man who sat at the head

of the largest table, and who he judged, from various circumstances, to be the chairman.

He was a brawny, hairy man, and certainly not less than six feet in height.

His hands and arms were immense.

It would not have been necessary for the most casual observer to look twice to see that he was possessed of enormous muscular strength—such, indeed, as falls to the lot of few persons to possess.

But it was not the man's huge frame that attracted Sheppard's attention, it was his face.

Strange as it may appear, it was of a half blue, half purple tint.

Whether real or artificial, Jack could not tell.

It made his whole aspect hideous and repulsive in the extreme.

"How very extraordinary," thought Jack. "Whoever can he be?"

At this moment the man with the blue face spoke.

Jack recognised his voice.

It was that of the man who had been called Mr. Blake, and who had sung the extraordinary ditty we felt we were compelled to give to our readers in its entirety.

"Order, pals, order!" cried Mr. Blake, knocking vigorously upon the table with a small ivory hammer. "Order, order!"

"Order, order!" echoed several other voices, and then something like silence was obtained.

"I never sings that song," began Mr. Blake, "without thinking of the chap I learned it of. He was a brave fellow, that he was. Many a glorious night have we spent together; but that is a long while ago, when I was hardly twenty."

"It's a downright good'un," said some one in reply, "who was it that learned it you?"

"Most of you must have heard of the name. He was a crackman of the first order, and though his career was a very brief one, he made himself a reputation that won't easily be forgotten. He suffered at the triple tree nineteen years ago this very day, and that's what puts me more in mind of him, poor fellow! It will be a long time before we look upon his like again!"

Why there is but one man that would come up to that description," said a man who was seated next to Jack on his right hand.

"You are right there. Such a description would apply to no one but him. He was a rare fellow! It was through him that I got my face such a colour as it is."

"Was it, really?" asked several voices. "I have often wondered what was the cause of it."

"I'll tell you now," said Mr. Blake, finishing his glass of punch. "It's a thing that always vexes me, and I was uncommon savage when it occurred. But it's no good grieving about shed milk. It can't be altered now."

"And it was through that you got called BLUESKIN, Mr. Blake?"

"It were!" replied the chairman, emphatically. "Not that I mind that in the least, only what vexed me was that I should always be known if once seen a mile off."

"Ah! that you would. That's the inconvenientest part of it," said another voice.

"However, how I got it was very singular. You must first know my pal and me was out on a little business one night. I won't say where, but there was a strong box we very much wanted to open, but for the life of us we couldn't manage it. 'This is very aggravating,' says I; 'what shall we do?' 'I don't know,' says he; 'yet stop. I have an idea.' 'What is it?' says I. 'We'll blow the lock open,' says he. 'With gunpowder?' says I. 'Yes,' says he. 'Where shall you get the powder from?' says I. 'Oh!' says he, 'I've got some in my pocket!' So he took out a little paper parcel, and laid it open on the ground just by the box. Well, he takes some of this powder, and rams it into the keyhole. It was quite a fresh notion to me, so, like a fool, I put my face a good deal closer than I had need. 'Let me light it!' says I. So I got out a match, and lighted the powder in the keyhole, and then a most awful scorching flame shot up into my face. 'Fire and fury!' I cried. 'I'm done for! I'm blinded!' 'We shall both be done for,' says he, 'if you make that noise.' Well, it turned out some of the sparks from the match dropped on to the paper on the floor, and set light to all the gunpowder. However, my pal went to the box and found it opened, for the inside of the lock

was clean blown out! He got the swag, and we got off all safe. I was blind for many a day after, but at last I recovered my vision, and at last got well. But the powder got into my skin, and nothing will fetch it out; so ever since then I have had a blue face, and that's why people calls me BLUESKIN."

Mr. Blake's extraordinary account of how he came with a blue face was listened to with the greatest interest, and several comments were passed upon it.

At last some one said—

"But I say, Blueskin, you haven't told us now, what was the name of the pal who was with you, and who, you said, was tucked up at Old Tyburn nineteen years ago."

"No more I did," said Mr. Blake; "that was a little omission on my part. I always get forgetful and stupid, somehow, when I think of my old friend. It was a pity he was cut off in his prime as he were. I shall never forget him, and I know there'll never be his equal!"

"But his name, Blue?—his name?" cried several voices.

Joe Blake rose from his chair, as he said—

"His name, pals, was TOM SHEPPARD!"

"TOM SHEPPARD?" shouted Jack, springing up so suddenly, that he overturned his seat, and, pushing his way up to Blueskin, who looked at him with the utmost astonishment, "TOM SHEPPARD? Do you mean to say that you were a comrade of my father's?"

CHAPTER VI.

JACK SHEPPARD, BY BLUESKIN'S ADVICE, JOINS JONATHAN WILD'S GANG.

BLUESKIN gasped for breath.

"God bless me!" he said, at length, "he's the very image!"

No sooner had he uttered these words, than a scene of the greatest possible confusion ensued.

Jack looked about him in perfect calmness.

A dozen hands were outstretched towards him.

Joe Blake rose to his feet, and, catching Jack in his arms, almost smothered him in his embrace.

"That ever I should have lived to see this day," he said. "I never knew Tom had a son, but I can't doubt your assertion. You are exactly like he was at your age. I never saw such a wonderful resemblance."

Blueskin took up his hammer, and struck it upon the table until order was restored.

"Silence, pals," he said. "Silence. You've heard a bit of this, of course. Order, there. I've got some one to introduce as you'll live yet to be proud of. Pals, fill up your glasses, and drink to the health of my old comrade's son. What's your name?" he asked in a whisper.

"Jack."

"Drink to the health of JACK SHEPPARD!"

Thus suddenly did Jack find himself lionized, and it is scarcely to be wondered at that it made the lad vain, and blinded him to the fact that, under no circumstances, could it be any honour to be received by such company as was there present.

His health, however, was drunk by every person in the room with loud applause, for to all of them was the name of the crackman, Tom Sheppard, familiar.

Jack stammered out some words in reply, and then sat down next to Blueskin, a seat having been provided for his special use.

"But what brings you here, Jack, lad?" asked Blake. "How is it we have never heard of you before?"

"I am an apprentice," said Jack, "and have been outlived, through ill treatment, to leave my master."

"Ah! Jack, you were lucky to drop in here. But how came you to do so?"

"Some impulse which I could not control, urged me hither. I entered, and took a seat unobserved, and was about to leave again, when I heard my father's name mentioned."

"It's a rare chance. But strange things do happen sometimes. However, Jack, I repeat it was lucky you came here. If you choose, you can live the life of a gentleman for the rest of your days. Do you say the word?"

"I do," said Jack, "for I'm quite careless what comes of me!"



[BLUESKIN INTRODUCES JACK SHEPPARD TO JONATHAN WILD.]

"Now don't say that, Jack,—don't say that! Never despond, my boy—never despond! It's the worst thing in the world."

"But how can I help it? What is to become of me? John Roots has ruined me for life! Who would employ an apprentice who has not served his time?"

"Well, not many, perhaps," said Blueskin. "But I do happen to know some one who would be very glad to secure the services of such a sharp chap as you are!"

Jack was silent, but he nevertheless felt flattered at Blueskin's description of him.

"And not only that," said Blueskin, "the fact of your having left your master would be more a recommendation to him than otherwise."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"And when he knows your name, and who you are the son of, he will be ten times more anxious to have you than before."

"That's very odd," said Jack, who had not been

sparing with the strong liquors on the table before him. "That's very odd! Nobody that I have met with yet would ever have a word further to say to me when they knew my father was a housebreaker and died at Tyburn. Just as if I could help that!"

"Just as if you could indeed. But Jack, my lad, when you've lived as long as I have, and seen as much of the world, you will find it about as reasonable in most other things as it is in that."

As he finished speaking, Blueskin took up his chairman's hammer, and rapped violently upon the table.

Whether it was to call for order in the disorderly assemblage, or whether it was to give due weight to the opinion he had uttered, is best known to himself.

"But stop," said Jack. "You asked me, if I would like to live like a gentleman for the rest of my days."

"I did."

"And that you knew some one who would take me. Is it so?"

"It is, Jack—it is. Only say the word, and there you are. It was a most fortunate thing for you that you came in here to-night!"

"I hope it will be so, was the reply. "But, tell me. Who is this person who will give me employment, and the means to live like a gentleman for the rest of my days?"

"I'll warrant you'll know the name well when I mention it," said Blueskin, with a smile.

"Who is it?" asked Jack, impatiently.

"Jonathan Wild!"

"Jonathan Wild?"

"Yes! Jonathan Wild! I told you you would know the name!"

"But," said Jack, "what does he want with me?"

"Ah, now you're asking what perhaps I ought not to tell you; but if you'll give me your word you'll not split, I'll trust you!"

"You have it, then."

"Jonathan Wild—Jonathan Wild the Great! as he is generally and justly called—and he is a great man, I can assure you, lives in the house next door to Newgate."

"I know that."

"Very well. Now I am his lieutenant!"

"His what?"

"Lieutenant—deputy—or whatever you like to call it. I am second in command."

"To Jonathan Wild?"

"Yes! And I am quite sure he would be overjoyed if you would join his band! It is the best thing you can do. Society has set its face against you, and as you are the weakest you will go to the wall unless you choose to take up arms and defend yourself."

"This speech was rather incomprehensible to Jack."

"But what am I to do?"

"Oh, Jonathan will soon put you up to all that. Do you consent to do as I advise?"

"I do! As well that as anything!"

"As well that? And better too, I should think. All you've got to do is to act on the square, and keep friends with Jonathan, and you're all right. But I must tell you his temper is not the most amiable in the world, and his friendship very difficult to retain."

"Oh!"

"However, the fact of the case is simply this: my gaffer, Jonathan Wild, is a kind of inter—what do you call it—cessor?—Yes!—he is a kind of intercessor between the robber and the robbed!"

"I don't understand."

"Oh, but you will do before long, and I am not a very neat hand at explaining anything."

Jack placed his arm upon the table, and let his head sink upon it.

"Hullo!" said Blueskin. "What's up! Come Jack, my lad, don't give way to your feelings in that way! Have another glass, and let's have a manly heart, and no whining! Cheer up, I say, for I can tell you your fortune's made!"

But Jack's heart was heavy.

Blueskin patted him encouragingly upon the back.

"You won't deceive me! Lor' bless you, I can see it's in you. I know well enough what you're going to be! Nature has formed you for it, and the world has determined you shall do nothing else! Your's will be a dashing career, I tell you!"

Jack looked up.

The tears were in his eyes.

But they were not the indications of a genuine grief.

The unusual quantity of spirit which he had imbibed, and to the use of which he was an utter stranger, had affected his brain, and superinduced that species of intoxication called maudlin.

"There, that's right! Don't be a girl, Jack! There was nothing of the woman in your father's disposition. Oh! no—quite the reverse! I tell you what it is, Jack! I am sure of it! Before you are a month older you will be a more notorious and expert cracksman than your father was!"

"My father?"

"Yes, my old pal; you know! A short life and a merry one! Plenty of excitement! Plenty of adventure! Plenty of money! What more can you require?"

Jack shuddered.

"My father!" he said, "you speak of him! Would I were not his son, and then I should have been spared all that I have suffered in consequence!"

"Oh! that be hanged," said Blueskin, "you ought to be proud! And you will, too, when you know a little more. Let us drop it, and join the company. They are surprised at our long talk! Come, rouse up! Remember you have promised to become a member of Jonathan Wild's band!"

CHAPTER VII.

RETURNS TO JONATHAN WILD, LORD INGESTRIE, AND THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

"WHAT did you say, Mr. Wild?"

That was the question to which Lord Ingestrie gave utterance when he heard Jonathan murmur some words whose meaning he could not catch.

"Nothing. That is, nothing of any importance!"

Jonathan had to twitch his wig to regain his composure.

"It is really an extraordinary and audacious affair, your lordship—very audacious indeed! Last night did you say it occurred?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say this morning, for, though her ladyship cannot say precisely when she missed the necklace, yet she fancies it must have been after she left the countess's saloons."

"Perhaps," said Jonathan, with a leer, "it may not have been stolen, but only lost? String broken—come unfasted, or something of that sort, eh? Have you offered any reward?"

"Not publicly, Mr. Wild, not publicly."

Jonathan rubbed his hands slowly one over the other, and looked attentively at his visitor.

"We were at first of your opinion, Mr. Wild," continued his lordship, "and thought—nay, made sure that it had been lost only; but though every inquiry and instant search was made, no traces of it could be found!"

"How unfortunate."

"The news of the loss soon spread among the servants, and I am sure the reward that was offered would have induced whoever had found it to give it up."

Jonathan shut one eye.

He feigned to be quite overcome by his lordship's extreme cleverness.

"Dear me," he said, "if you were a professional man I should be quite jealous of you! There is nothing like taking prompt steps in a matter of that sort."

"I think not," said his lordship, with a little more pomposity in the tones of his voice than there was a minute before. "You see, as I said, not only is the necklace intrinsically very valuable, but an heir-loom that has been in the possession of the Ingestrie family to generations."

"Ah!" said Wild. "How much did you offer the servants if they found it?"

"A hundred guineas!"

Jonathan laughed in his usual disagreeable fashion.

"What's that?"

"I laughed, my lord."

"Why? At what?"

"The idea of thinking a hundred pounds was a large reward for such an object."

"It is a large amount."

"To a beggar, probably!"

"However," said his lordship, rather angrily, "I am quite certain it was stolen—not lost, and that none of the countess's servants had it."

"Oh, indeed! Well, it is just possible you are right."

Jonathan glanced at his hat lying on the desk, and beneath which so snugly reposed Lady Ingestrie's diamond necklace.

Little did his lordship dream that the identical thing which he was in search of was just under his nose.

But so it was.

"I was advised to come to you, Mr. Wild," resumed Lord Ingestrie, "for I had been told you had frequently succeeded in obtaining things which had been stolen."

"Or lost," said Jonathan, with a sly grin, "your lordship's information is quite correct."

"I thought the less time that was lost the better it would be, so I came here at once."

Wild bowed.

"If your lordship will please say what you require, I will see what can be done."

"I want the necklace back as soon as possible."

"Exactly! Now you must understand, your lordship, I never make any charge for what trouble I may have in the matter. Never, by any chance! My only object in doing it is to assist persons like yourself, for instance, to get back property which would otherwise be lost to them for ever."

"That is very praiseworthy upon your part, Mr. Wild."

"Now, with respect to this necklace. I have no doubt I can get it back for you if you are willing to pay a price for it. I have agents of mine to whom all the thieves in London are known, and it could be ascertained in the course of a very few hours whether it was in the possession of any one of them or not."

"I see; and supposing you find some one has it, what then?"

"The person is at once communicated with, and told that the owner wishes to get back his stolen property. A reply is then sent, naming such and such a sum, which, if given, and no questions asked, the goods will be returned."

Wild paused, but as Lord Ingestrie said nothing, he went on.

"You will of course understand, my lord, that neither of the principal parties concerned, come into contact with each other, and having thus explained the matter, what amount does your lordship think of offering to the person who has the necklace, to give it up?"

Jonathan's hand wandered to his hat.

Little did Lord Ingestrie imagine that the necklace was beneath it.

"What should you think, Mr. Wild?"

"Oh! you ought to be the best judge of that, since you know exactly what value you put upon it, and I don't."

"But they will not expect the full value, surely?"

"Something very like it they would, if they knew your lordship set store by it."

"But they needn't know that."

"Certainly not!"

"And then, another thing, they would not be able to dispose of it to anyone! It is too well known!"

"In its present state it is; but, dear me, there are men in London who will buy any kind of jewels, and ask no questions."

"But how do they contrive to dispose of the stolen goods?"

"That, I imagine, is a secret best known to themselves. I should think very likely the jewels were picked out, the settings melted, and then remanufactured, or perhaps sent direct on to the continent."

"You seem to know all about it, Mr. Wild?"

"I do, your lordship. In my position as head police-officer it is necessary that I should know all about it."

"To be sure it is. But come, what is it to be?"

"That," said Jonathan, pushing his wig back on to the crown of his head. "That, as I said before, it would be best for you to name; but still, if your lordship wishes me to make a suggestion—"

"I do, Mr. Wild."

"That is sufficient. Then I humbly beg to suggest that you offer four thousand guineas for the necklace!"

"Four thousand guineas! Nonsense. You must be dreaming!"

"Your lordship forgets that you asked me to suggest an amount."

"I know, Mr. Wild. But I consider that beyond the bounds of all reason."

"I am sorry that your lordship is of such an opinion. It's quite erroneous, I can assure you—quite erroneous!"

Jonathan shook his head in quite a melancholy way.

"But, Mr. Wild, consider. You must surely have made some mistake. That is its full value."

Jonathan appeared to reflect for a moment.

"Look here, your lordship, its no advantage to me, I sacredly assure you, to advise you to give so much. In fact, if your lordship had not pressed me as you did, I should not have named a sum at all. However, you are not bound to follow my advice. Offer for its return whatever you think proper, and I will try what can be done."

It was now Lord Ingestrie's turn to reflect.

"I will tell you what I will do. I will offer three thousand pounds for the restoration of the jewel, which sum, Mr. Wild, I don't mind telling you, is one I can ill spare. Can you get it back for that?"

Jonathan Wild put his elbows on the desk, and rested his chin in his hands.

"Now, my lord, you have asked me a question to which it is impossible for me to give a reply. I will, as I told you in the first place, send out my agents to make inquiries for it. Should they be successful, they will offer the three thousand pounds; but whether the person who holds the necklace will give it up for that amount is more than I can tell."

"I comprehend."

"I am glad you do."

"But I do not like the idea of encouraging robberies in this way, Mr. Wild."

"Of course you don't. No more would anyone else. But this is it. The person who stole the necklace may be found, captured, convicted, executed; but that is all the satisfaction you would have, my lord. You would never see your diamond necklace again, unless under some form when you would not recognize it."

"I suppose such is the case; but surely, Mr. Wild, there is room for amendment in the law, and next session I shall assuredly bring the matter forward, and see if I cannot be the means of having an alteration."

"Do so, my lord—do so. You will obtain the thanks of the whole country at large."

A most infernal hypocrite was Jonathan Wild, for while he uttered this speech, so inimical as it was to his own interests, no one would have dreamed, to look at his face, that he was doing other than enthusiastically enunciating those opinions which he had nearest to his heart.

But he did not trust himself to speak further upon the subject.

"However, your lordship, I am too much occupied just now, and I dare say you are too to go any further into that subject. Let us see that we clearly understand each other about this diamond necklace!"

"Very good."

"Your lordship offers three thousand pounds if it is given up intact?"

"I do!"

"And give your word to take no ulterior steps in the matter?"

"I suppose I must say yes to that too, though it goes sadly against the grain."

"Then, your lordship," said Wild, getting down off his stool, and holding open the door, "if you will call here at this time to-morrow, I will give you a report of my success. Good morning, your lordship, good morning!"

"Good morning, Mr. Wild!"

CHAPTER VIII.

PLACES THE READER IN POSSESSION OF SOME FACTS RELATIVE TO JONATHAN WILD.

WITH the greatest of care, Jonathan Wild closed the door of his office after his noble visitor.

There was a contortion of his visage which might, by a stretch of the imagination, be construed into a grin.

He mounted his stool.

He lifted his hat.

There, on his desk, scattering faint scintillations of light from its numerous facets, was the diamond necklace.

Very rich, very chaste, very beautiful—but, above all, very valuable it looked.

The contortion on Jonathan's face expanded.

The cackling noise in his throat, which we have before described, began to make itself heard.

The great thief-taker was undoubtedly delighted beyond measure.

He picked up the necklace by the clasp at one end of it, and raised his arm so that it hung down in a straight line.

Jonathan gazed at it with great admiration.

Like many, he had a fancy for glittering ornaments, and

he took care that there should be no lack of such things about his own apparel.

Few people at that time thought it, but they were all genuine.

And so the contemplation simply of the diamond necklace gave him pleasure.

But, much as he admired and liked it, he preferred the three thousand guineas which Lord Ingestrie had offered for its restoration.

In the position Jonathan now held the necklace, and as he communicated to it a slight rotatory motion, it sparkled and looked most gorgeous.

Then, having gazed his fill, he placed his other hand underneath it, and lowered it slowly into his palm, where it lay in a glittering, conglomerate heap.

He took hold of the clasp again, and amused himself by gently raising and lowering it in his hand.

It was a childish action, but it pleased the great mind of the great Jonathan Wild.

But his agreeable occupation was interrupted.

A hasty step sounded in the passage without.

A hand was placed upon the handle of the door.

Before he had time to do more than let the necklace fall wholly into his left hand and close his fingers over it, which only in a very insufficient manner concealed it, the door was opened, and Lord Ingestrie, looking heated and excited, rushed in.

With a presence of mind really admirable, Jonathan, without the least perceptible indication of embarrassment, carried his left hand to his coat pocket.

He dropped in the necklace, and was safe.

Turning towards Lord Ingestrie for an explanation of his unlooked-for and hasty intrusion, he noticed that there was an angry expression in his lordship's eyes.

"You are surprised to see me back, Mr. Wild, I have no doubt?"

Wild bowed in assent to the proposition.

"It is disgraceful—abominable, Mr. Wild—disgraceful in the extreme!"

"My lord?"

"That such things should happen in broad day in a crowded street! I say again it is abominable, Mr. Wild, and is the result of that system to which I have consented to become a party."

"I do not understand—you have not informed me what has taken place," said Wild, with some misgiving; "pray, my lord, be more explicit."

"Explicit! what do you mean, Mr. Wild?"

"Your lordship forgets that you have not yet told me what has happened that has so much disconcerted you."

"True!" replied Lord Ingestrie. "I had forgot! Excuse me, I beg."

"No apologies, my lord—no apologies! Pray tell me what is the matter?"

"This! You are perhaps aware I came here in my carriage!"

"I was not aware of it, though, of course, I did not suspect that you had come on foot."

"My man, while waiting for me it seems, walked the horses up and down the street."

"Just so, your lordship."

"Well, when I left your door I saw the carriage a little beyond the corner of Giltspur-street, and as I felt disinclined to wait on your doorstep until he drew up, I made him a sign that I would walk to the spot where the carriage then was."

"Yes—yes!"

"It was an unfortunate proceeding for me; for, before I had gone a dozen yards, a young chap ran up against me. I guessed at his object, and endeavoured to capture him, but he eluded my grasp, and was off round the corner of the Old Bailey like a shot."

"Good gracious!"

"And when I carried my hand to my pocket, I found my gold repeater, chains, and seals clean gone."

"Impossible!"

"I wish, with all my heart, it was. But my watch has gone—stolen from me in the presence of fifty people, and the thief escaped."

"It is a most unparalleled occurrence."

"Ought such a state of things to continue for a single moment?" asked his lordship, in a great rage. "Answer me that? But I'll rouse the country. I'll try if there

can't be a stop put to such shameful, bare-faced robberies! I'll see what can and what can't be done!"

"I very much regret such a thing should have happened your lordship, very sorry. But surely you do not blame me in the matter?"

"Oh no!—oh no!" replied Lord Ingestrie, in a tone of voice that belied his words. "Only it seemed natural for me to run in here!"

"You were quite right in doing so, quite right! Rely upon it, everything shall be done that lies in my power to get it back again for you, and if possible, to punish the offender."

"Oh! I have no doubt of that, Mr. Wild," said his lordship, somewhat mollified.

"Can you give me a description of the thief?"

"Well, hardly. He was young and thin, and that's all I can say about him!"

"You must allow, my lord, that that description is rather vague!"

"I am conscious that it is—fully conscious."

"But, with respect to the watch and its appendages, I suppose you can be a little more precise?"

"Oh—yes," said Lord Ingestrie, who thereupon entered into a minute description of his watch and seals.

Jonathan took it down in some hieroglyphics which he was pleased to dignify by the name of writing.

"You trust to me, my lord," he said. "When you call here to-morrow for intelligence respecting the necklace, I will try if I cannot give you some of a satisfactory nature respecting your watch and seals."

"Thanks, Mr. Wild; and now I will go. This has been a most unfortunate affair for me altogether."

"It has," said Jonathan, pulling his wig forward vigorously, "and no one I am sure deplores it more than myself. The only consolation I have in the matter is, that I am in a position to do your lordship a service. If I could afford it, you should be put to no expense whatever."

"No, no, I don't wish that. It would not be fair. Good morning, Mr. Wild."

"Good morning, your lordship. I hope you will have better luck this time."

"I will try, at all events," said Lord Ingestrie.

Wild listened for the closing of the first door.

"Ha, ha!" he said, as soon as he heard the expected sound, "ha, na! Lost his watch! He, he!"

Jonathan put on his hat, and took up his pet.

"Not a bad morning's work, so far," he said. "What a fool Pinching Tom must be, to be sure! If he had just been civil, as he ought, he would have had his share of the swag!"

He looked round his office.

"I've a good mind to pay a visit to C. 7," he said. "I've a good mind, and I will too!"

Having come to this determination, Jonathan hastily left his office and passed out into the hall.

The man at the grating flung it open, and allowed Wild to pass through.

We have already described the route to the cells or dungeons beneath Wild's house.

Jonathan was soon at the door of C. 7.

He did not enter, though, nor did he even open the door.

Just about on a level with his face was a little square piece of wood, sliding in a groove, and this he pushed aside.

It disclosed a circular aperture, crossed by three iron bars.

Jonathan knocked at the cell door with his bludgeon, making a terrible clatter.

"Hi, Tom! Pinching Tom!" he said. "Where are you? I've come to see you, villain!"

A suppressed howl came to his ears.

"Oh! you are sulky, Tom, my friend, are you? You'll soon get over that! You'll know how to speak another time, and be civil to me; that is, if you have the chance! You're a clever chap, though, Tom, and I shouldn't like to part with you just yet. Now, then, are you going to speak or not, eh?"

"What do you want?" growled a voice.

"Speak respectfully, you villainous-looking wretch! Speak civilly, without you want to be tucked up on Monday! Do you hear?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"If you had spoke as you ought when you came in, I should have given you something worth having for the necklace, but I offered you fifty pounds to make you know yourself better. Do you hear that, Tom?"

"I does, Mr. Wild, I does."

Pinching Tom's voice was becoming more submissive in its tone.

Perhaps he had come to the conclusion that it would be preferable to sacrifice some of his insolent bearing to losing his life on the scaffold, for he knew well enough Wild had the power to send him there.

"I hopes, Mr. Wild, as how you'll forgive me this time," he said, "and I will bring you something worth your while to have. I'm sure that necklace is more than any one else has ever brought!"

"Well, perhaps it is, Tom, perhaps it is! I've got a tender heart, Tom, and I couldn't go and sit down leaving you here. You promise to do differently in future?"

"I does, Mr. Wild; I does indeed, if you'll only let me out!"

CHAPTER IX.

GIVES THE READER A DEEPER INSIGHT INTO JONATHAN'S MODE OF LIFE.

JONATHAN WILD unlocked the cell door, and flung it open upon its hinges.

Pinching Tom came forth.

Straws were entangled in his hair, and clinging to various portions of his apparel.

On the whole, he looked much the worse for his brief sojourn in C. 7.

He stood before the great thief-taker in an attitude humble enough to satisfy him, and waited for him to speak.

"This is an act more clement, I can assure you, than I generally perform."

"I knows it, Mr. Wild."

"But I like you, Tom! You are a clever fellow! That's why I give you a chance for your life."

"Thanks, Mr. Wild!"

"Oh! stuff. Be off with you!"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"But mind you, if you don't act up to the square, so sure as I'm a living man I will have you convicted and executed; so mind that!"

There was something very horrible in the vindictive way in which Wild pronounced these words.

Pinching Tom shuddered.

"You may trust me, Mr. Wild, I am sure."

"Very well, come along, and say no more about it."

As he spoke, Wild fastened the door of No. 7, and preceded Pinching Tom along the passage, who was glad enough when he emerged into Newgate-street—never had it seemed to wear so bright an appearance as it did then.

But at present it is not Pinching Tom with whom we have to do, but Jonathan Wild.

Having thus released his prisoner, he ascended the broad flight of stairs in the hall, and entered a front room on the first floor.

This was his private apartment, where he repaired to solace himself with a glass, and cogitate upon the affairs of the day, and concoct new villainies for the morrow.

When he opened the door there arose from the hearth a dog who, with lowered ears and tail, slunk across the room towards him.

It was Jonathan Wild's dog.

He, with a sagacity that was almost human, had learned that submission was what his master liked to see, and he exhibited it accordingly.

But by no means was he a coward; he was cunning and ferocious as the thief-taker himself.

Had any one seen him they would have set him down as an ugly customer.

When in the streets—for he sometimes accompanied Jonathan in his excursions—he was looked at with suspicion by the passengers, and children ran terrified away, while other dogs, by various artifices, endeavoured to elude his observation.

In his way he was as much feared as his owner.

We do not know how it was that Jonathan Wild came

to keep a dog, unless we account for it on the principle that all human natures, no matter how brutal, have a certain amount of affection which they find it is necessary to have some object to transfer to.

But one would think there was scarcely enough of this feeling in Jonathan Wild's disposition to make it requisite that he should have something to carry it off.

But, be that as it may, there was the dog, and one fact is worth a thousand theories.

Very short in the nose, very thick in the neck, very broad in the chest, very slim in the body was Jonathan Wild's dog.

He looked up in his master's face, and seeing there a rather more complacent expression than usual, ventured to prick up his ears, and in a feeble kind of way to wag his apology for a tail.

But he did not presume upon any further demonstration of affection.

He crept back to his position on the hearth.

Jonathan's face certainly did look calm and composed—wonderfully so.

He was illuding himself with the notion that he had, by releasing Pinching Tom, done a generous and noble action.

But it was policy alone that induced him to do what he had done.

Well enough he knew the value of him, and that it would be long before he found any one who could replace him.

Still he thought the little piece of discipline he had administered would be beneficial.

Whether it really was or no time alone can tell us.

Jonathan drew a chair to the table and sat down.

He removed his hanger from his waist, and stood it up against the mantel-piece.

Upon the table were a bottle, glass jug, a clay pipe, and several other articles.

He took up the bottle, and poured some fluid from it into the glass, which from its colour and odour was surely brandy.

Then he filled his pipe, lighted it, and leaned back in his chair.

Jonathan Wild was at ease.

He smoked with great deliberation, fixing his eyes first on the rude pictures, which certainly hid the nakedness of the walls, if they did no more, and then upon the smoke-begrimed ceiling.

And this was what Jonathan conceived enjoyment to be.

Some people have most eccentric ideas upon the subject.

But much as may be said against Jonathan's mode of enjoying himself, surely it was not so bad as those who flocked by thousands to see a poor woman risk her life in Aston-park the other day by walking on a frail rope stretched many feet above the ground.

They were gratified, doubtless, at the consummation of the tragedy—they were at any rate, if their behaviour afterwards be taken as a criterion.

In our opinion they were just a trifle worse than Jonathan Wild!

And that is saying a great deal!

Wild grew still more and more composed.

Things had gone well with him that day.

And now we think that as he is in such a happy frame of mind, we cannot do better than take the opportunity, as such a good one may never occur again, of giving the reader a yet clearer insight into Wild's household arrangements, and very questionable transactions.

It will save much future trouble, and assist greatly to make the reader fully comprehend what follows.

These details too, will be interesting in an historical point of view, since the writer has taken the trouble to peruse the Old Bailey records, from whence he has derived the fullest and most authentic information relative to Jonathan Wild.

In the course of the ensuing narrative, the whole of the facts he has gathered will be embodied, so that it may be relied upon as an authentic account of his entire career.

The same remarks will apply also to the other two prominent characters—Jack Sheppard and Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin.

These three individuals are universally allowed to be

the most extraordinary characters which the criminal records of any country can exhibit.

The main thread or outline of this romance may therefore be relied upon as actual fact, the subsidiary portions being composed of simply such incidents as may call forth the deepest degree of interest.

It has been hinted a few pages back that Jonathan Wild had at his command a gang of desperadoes.

Such was the fact.

The principal members of this band were Blueskin, who was second in command to Wild himself, and Quilt Arnold.

Ostensibly a chief of the police, Jonathan was enabled to keep these men without suspicion or remark, since they were all attired in a precisely similar manner to the ordinary police force, and their duties were supposed to be similar also.

But such was very far from being the case.

Jonathan Wild had also established himself upon a firmer basis by ingratiating himself with the ruling powers by the discovery of Jacobite plots, and the delivery of the offenders to justice.

Such things just then were very common, for the change of dynasty had not endured for a period of time sufficiently long for the people to get used to it, and for the prejudices in favour of the occupation of the throne by the Stuarts, who had held it for so many generations, to become extinct.

Many people, therefore, who felt those very ticklish things called honour and conscience were concerned in the matter, endeavoured to fan the breath of rebellion in the land, and to some great extent succeeded.

The three first Georges had a mortal terror of the Jacobites, as all the adherents to the deposed king James were called, and they used every means they could devise for their extermination.

When therefore Jonathan showed himself instrumental in bringing many of these people to the scaffold, he was looked upon with an eye of favour by the Court party, and there is no doubt that this was the reason why many of his mal-practices were allowed to pass unnoticed.

But as he found himself so eminently successful, larger schemes of aggrandizement began to dawn upon Wild's mind.

He conceived and carried out the very original plan of organizing all the thieves of the metropolis into one body, who should all look to him as their leader.

The mode of operations was very simple.

Whatever booty they might be successful in obtaining was to be brought at once to Jonathan Wild, who gave them for it a certain sum of money, of course very much less than the real value of the articles, and yet more than they could obtain of the ordinary receivers of stolen goods in the metropolis.

He exercised over these men a tremendous power, since he was able, at any time, to get up a case against them, and have them convicted and executed.

Hence, it was clearly the best policy to keep friends with Jonathan Wild, for, so long as they did so, they were exempt from the penalty which the law demanded for their crimes.

But that was only one portion of Wild's business.

He not only trafficked with the thieves, but also, as in the case of Lord Ingestrie, with the persons from whom things had been stolen.

And incredible as such a scene as that described as taking place between Wild and Lord Ingestrie may be, yet it is no more than a bare statement of facts.

Of course there were many people who were robbed of highly-prized articles, who were glad to obtain Wild's assistance to get back their property for a consideration.

His statement with respect to the manner in which the stolen goods came into his possession was straightforward in the extreme.

His officers, he said, were mostly able, by making inquiries at places where thieves were known to congregate, to ascertain who had the article, and for what sum they would be willing to give it up, and no questions asked.

To this, for the reasons given, people were generally glad enough to agree.

Then, with an art that was really consummate, Wild

always refused to make any charge for his trouble in getting back the stolen goods.

He pretended that it was a part of his duty, though, at the same time, he contrived to hint that he should not be offended if some gratuity were offered to him for his services, the amount of such gratuity to be proportionate to the worth they attached to what he had done.

In this way he avoided liability to the laws, for it was not until years afterwards, when his transactions came to light, that such a thing amounted to compounding a felony.

But, as the reader can already see, such was not Wild's precise method of carrying on his business.

All stolen goods were, in the first instance, brought direct to him, and, upon their handing them over to him, he gave a certain amount, running the risk whether there should happen to be any inquiries made about them.

Hence it often happened—as in the case of the diamond necklace—that Wild had the goods actually in his possession when people came to make inquiries about them, and employ him to get them back.

But Wild was always politic enough to allow a day or two, and sometimes a week to elapse, before the goods were restored.

By doing this he not only warded off suspicion, but apparently enhanced the value of his services.

But there was another contingency to provide against.

Of course a large proportion of the stolen goods he purchased were never asked about at all, so a means had to be devised for their safe and profitable disposal.

To do this Wild again exhibited his invention. A Dutch trading vessel was purchased by him, and provided with a crew.

This ship—or rather lugger—conveyed ostensibly ordinary merchandise, but it also served to transport the stolen property to Holland, where there was no danger nor difficulty of disposing of it at a large profit.

From this it must be evident that Jonathan amassed a large sum of money, though what became of it no one knows.

He certainly never spent it all himself.

The presumption is he had some place or places for secreting it, and where it was never found.

There was also another source of income which Wild had, and upon which he never touched.

Provided, as he was known to be, with powers from the Secretary of State, which no one could form a correct estimate of, he did not scruple to seize upon many innocent people and immure them in the cells beneath his house, where, if they did not choose to submit to the extortion of a large ransom, they were denounced as Jacobites and traitors.

That a denunciation of such crimes at that period by no less an accuser than Jonathan Wild was equivalent to condemnation and execution is a well-known fact, so it is not to be wondered at, that people of the two evils chose the less, and submitted to be mulcted in a large amount.

But we have yet further to go.

Utterly indifferent upon the subject of Jacobinism or loyalty—though it is mentioned by many that he had a decided leaning towards the former—Jonathan did not scruple to act in the same manner with those who were really guilty of the crimes of which they were accused, and thus they had an opportunity, by giving Wild a large sum of money, of evading the consequences of their actions.

Then there is every reason to suppose that Wild, by lending himself to some rather underhand measures proposed by the government, contrived to extort large sums from them also, as well as immunity for his offences.

Thus, no matter how things stood, money was sure to come into Jonathan Wild's hands somehow.

CHAPTER X.

BLUESKIN INTRODUCES JACK SHEPPARD TO JONATHAN WILD.

"JACK—Jack! Lift up your head. Wake up! wake up! There's business to do, and if you are going to do it, you must not be sleeping here. Awake! Awake, I say!"

It was Blueskin who spoke.

The boisterous company, which had assembled at the "Black Lion," had gradually dispersed.

To them, as to wild predatory animals, the advent of the day was the signal for them to seek some place of concealment until darkness again descended upon the earth.

So one by one, as the faint light of the approaching day straggled into the kitchen of the old inn, its noisy occupants slunk away.

Some went into Drury-lane, who lost no time in diving into the numerous courts that there abound, and others into odd nooks and corners of the inn itself.

These were the favoured few to whom the landlord, Joe Johnson, extended his protecting arm.

And so, ere the rising sun had shed his first beams upon the roof-tops, Joe Blake and his old comrade's son were the only persons left in the apartment.

Jack was sleeping heavily—so heavily that Blake could not awaken him.

His arms had fallen upon the table and his head on to his arms, and there he lay like one dead.

His breathing was heavy.

He was sleeping off the effects of the deep potations in which he had indulged, and to which he was so unaccustomed.

Upon Blueskin they appeared to have taken no effect.

He shook Jack roughly, and lifted up his head.

But even that failed to arouse him in the least.

He let his head fall again on to his arms.

"It's no good trying to wake him up, I see," he said.

"If I did he would be as stupid as an owl. He must sleep on, not here, though. Johnson, Johnson, my boy! come here!"

In obedience to his call the landlord appeared upon the threshold.

"This is a particular friend of mine," he said, "and you must find some place where he can have an hour or two's sleep."

"Oh! all right! I can soon do that, if you will bring him upstairs."

"That's no trouble," said Blueskin. "Here you go!"

So saying, he raised Jack in his arms, and followed the landlord out of the kitchen, along the passage, and up two flights of stairs.

Here the landlord pushed open a door, and Blake followed him into a double-bedded room.

In Blueskin's powerful arms Jack was no more than a child would be in the hands of most persons, so he walked across the room without an effort, and laid him on the bed.

"And what are you going to do, Blake?" asked the landlord, when Jack was thus satisfactorily disposed of.

"I must be off to my old quarters. Jonathan may want me, and I never like to be out of the way when he does."

"I s'pose not," said Johnson, descending the stairs. "Ah! he's a wonderful man, is Mr. Wild—a wonderful man! Any one could see that with half an eye!"

"And," said Joe, "if you could look at him with both your eyes wide open, you would think him a wonderful man indeed."

"I daresay, I daresay."

"But, Johnson, my boy, the lad upstairs is the son of my old comrade! Look after him carefully. When he awakes, let him have just what he likes. I will be answerable for it."

"Very good."

"Do not, however, let him leave the place on any account. It will be some hours, I rather think, before he opens his eyes again! Tell him to expect me every minute!"

"Then you are coming back to-day?"

"Oh! most certainly, you may expect to see me soon after noon."

"Very well, Mr. Blake; you may depend upon things being just as you desire. Good-bye!"

The landlord watched Blueskin cross Drury-lane, and turn down White Horse-yard on the opposite side of the way.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "strange fellow, that! He seems all open and candid, but I can't make him out a bit—not a bit! He's a perfect mystery to me. Here sometimes he speaks like a blackguard, sometimes like a born gentleman! It's very strange. Perhaps I shall know

who he is some day. I'll warrant, now, his name is no more Blake than it is Blueskin! I'd give no small trifle to hear his history, that I would! Perhaps I shall know it some day. Those that live longest stand the best chance of seeing and hearing most."

With this trite observation, the landlord of the "Black Lion" turned away from the street door to attend to his household duties.

It was almost twelve o'clock when Jack awoke from his lethargic slumber.

He looked about him for a few moments bewildered and surprised.

He could not make out how he came to be where he was.

There is scarcely anything more confusing to the perceptions than to wake up suddenly in a strange place which we have never before seen.

Jack just took one glance around him, and then closed his eyes again.

A measured and heavy footstep on the stairs attracted his attention.

He raised himself up a little on his elbow, and listened. But the effort was a painful one.

His head ached horribly.

Nearer and nearer, however, came the lumbering footsteps.

The door opened.

A face and form, of which he seemed to have some dim recollection, stood upon the threshold.

It was Joe Johnson, the landlord.

"So you've woke up at last, have you?" he said, roughly, but yet kindly. "Blest if I didn't think you had gone to sleep for good!"

"Who are you?" said Jack; "and what place is this? I seem to know your face, and yet I cannot recollect who you are."

"Me? Oh! I'm the landlord here. The "Black Lion", you know. This is one of my bed-rooms. Joe Johnson is my name. Mr. Blake put you there, and told me to look after you. Understand? He will be here directly."

"Blake—Blake!" repeated Jack, confusedly. "Blake? Who's Blake?"

"Oh, I can see there will be no good done with you in the way of talking just yet a bit. Take my advice. Lie still for half-an-hour. Don't go to sleep, though. You will find yourself better then. When you find your ideas a getting out of a tangle, jump up and pour this jug of cold water over your head. You will be as right as a trivet then. Good bye to you. Don't forget, Mr. Blake will be here soon."

The landlord left the room.

Johnson's words exactly expressed the state of Jack's mind.

It was in a tangle.

By slow degrees, however, as he lay upon the bed with his eyes closed, all that had occurred on the previous night arranged itself chronologically in his thoughts.

He recollected the quarrel he had had with his master. How he had been taunted with being the son of a man who was hanged. How he had been called a thief. How he had rushed from his master's house into the streets with fierce, vindictive words upon his lips. How he had returned at that still hour of the night when first we saw him, and heaped curses upon his master's head. Then came the struggle with the watchmen. His escape. His entry into the "Black Lion." The man with the blue face. The mention of his father's name. What had been said; and after that all was blank.

But it was no difficult matter to fill up the hiatus of his thoughts.

By the time he had done this he felt wonderfully better.

His head ached, but his brain was no longer perplexed.

He sprang from the bed, and seeing a huge pitcher of water, he followed the landlord's advice, and plunged his head completely into it.

The water, when it touched his inflamed skin, seemed icy cold.

It bubbled pleasantly about his ears and neck.

The pain ceased as if by magic.

It was such a relief, and so delightful to have his head under water, that he could not draw it out until his failing breath compelled him.

Then he felt wonderfully better.

Of a surety the landlord's treatment was efficacious, and he ducked in his head again and again, until at length he felt himself completely revived.

He proceeded then to arrange his apparel.

When he had finished he looked indeed very little the worse for his night's debauch. His eyes were bloodshot, and the lids full and overhanging, but that was all.

He stood, too, pretty firmly upon his legs.

"Let me see," he said, "the landlord told me, I think, I was to wait here until Blake, or Blueskin, as they call him, came. What does he want me for? Oh, I recollect—to join Jonathan Wild's band! I will do it, for something seems to tell me that the celebrated thief-taker and myself will be great friends. Perhaps, then, I may have my revenge upon John Roots! Oh, that would be sweet, indeed!"

The very thought of the distant prospect, even of consummating his revenge upon his master, appeared to endow him with a fresh accession of strength.

John Roots had raised up a more terrible enemy than he imagined.

Jack Sheppard stepped towards the door.

But just as he was about to fling it open and descend the stairs, and himself will be great friends. Perhaps, then, I may have my revenge upon John Roots! Oh, that would be sweet, indeed!"

He drew back at once.

That subtlety of intellect which pervaded all his actions prompted him instinctively to draw back rather than open the door, though he knew very well he had nothing to dread.

It was Blueskin.

"Bravo!" he said, on his entrance, on seeing how well Jack looked. "Bravo! Come along down stairs, and then to Jonathan Wild."

"I am ready," replied Jack. "I'll follow."

The pair quickly descended the stairs.

"In here first," said Blake, catching Jack by the sleeve, and dragging him through a little door on the right. "In here first."

It was the bar.

"Now Johnson, a couple of glasses of your best brandy, and then we're off!"

"Yes, Mr. Blake; with pleasure sir."

It was at first against Jack's inclination to imbibe any more spirits, but he was prevailed upon by his companion to do so.

"Just this one toothful," he said. "It is just what you require to set you right. You mark my words if you don't feel another man after it."

The toothful, as Blueskin called it, was a good-sized wine-glass full.

Nevertheless, Jack drank it off.

He became at once conscious of its effects.

The dull feeling which had oppressed him both bodily and mentally, passed away as if by magic.

Its effect was to produce a buoyancy of spirit, and a degree of recklessness which he had never before exhibited.

"Hurrah!" he said. "I'm all right now, and ready for anything."

"That's the ticket, then. We ought to lose no time, for I left Mr. Wild in his little room upstairs, where he always sits for an hour or two in the afternoon. That's when he's best tempered."

"Who cares whether he's good-tempered or bad, eh? I don't Blueskin, I don't."

Blake slapped him on the back just between the shoulders.

"Capital!" he said. "Capital! That was just like your father. Capital. But when you see Mr. Wild be civil, but bold."

"Oh, come along, I am ready to see him. Good bye, Johnson, old boy."

The landlord of the "Black Lion" looked quite agitated at the sudden change.

The fact was it was not altogether owing to the brandy having got into Jack's head that this sudden alteration took place, nor was it artificial and foreign to his nature. On the contrary, he had been noted for his recklessness, audacity, and good humour.

The events which we have at some length described, of course had for a time the natural result of diminishing the exuberance of his spirits, but with the elasticity of youth he had overcome all that.

"Now, Jack," he said, as they shaped their way towards Newgate-street; "just listen to me!"

He was encouraged by his strange and newly-formed friend, whom he followed eagerly to the street-door.

"Cut along."

"If you only manage matters carefully you will get on in the world. I have taken a great fancy to you, and I will look after you. Now, as you know, I am going to introduce you to Jonathan Wild."

"The great?"

"Yes; Jonathan Wild, the great! He is a great man, but, like all other great men, he has a weakness. It is harmless enough, and I won't say not natural enough, but it is a weakness notwithstanding."

"Oh! it is?"

"Yes."

"And what is yours?"

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours."

"I haven't one."

"How can that be?"

"Oh! easily enough."

"I don't see it."

"You don't?"

"Most certainly not."

"What did you tell me just now?"

"What about?"

"Jonathan Wild."

"And what about him?"

"You said that every great man had his weakness."

"I know I did, and it's quite true."

"Then what's your weakness? You don't mean to say you are not a great man?"

"Oh! stop your jokes. Listen to what I am going to tell you; you'll find it very important to you indeed."

"Oh! bother; listen to me. If every great man has a weakness, is every one who has got a weakness a great man?"

"Bah!"

"Because, if that's the case—and your's aint good logic if it isn't—I am a great man. I've got a weakness—a strong weakness, too! I love all the pretty girls I see."

"Don't be a fool, Jack, or I'm off, mind that. 'Woman's the devil,' as the old proverb says, and you'll find it out one of these days if you don't watch it."

"Never mind; I shall love them just the same bless their hearts. But what do you want to tell me?"

"Ah! now you're getting a little bit reasonable. Really, since you had that nip of brandy, you don't seem like the same."

"Oh! I feel all right, and as happy as a king. The only drawback is, I haven't had an opportunity of serving old Roots out."

"An opportunity will be sure to occur sooner or later, Jack, so don't let that trouble you. Now, here we are, at the corner of the Old Bailey, so if you want to hear how you are to behave to Mr. Wild, and have any regard for your neck, you'll listen patiently to what I've got to say."

"I am listening," said Jack.

CHAPTER XI.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH JACK SHEPPARD COMMITTED HIS FIRST ROBBERY.—THE ALARM.

He looked up at the large, black, gloomy-looking prison as he spoke.

Old Newgate!

Not the present uniform-looking structure, but the building which preceded it.

Little did Jack think, as he gazed upon the shining walls, how intimately that structure and himself were to be connected, and the fate for which he was predoomed.

But, in fact, he had no opportunity for thought, for his companion spoke to him earnestly.

"There is nothing," said he, "which Mr. Wild thinks so much of as being treated with respectful submission: mind that! He does not like one who is afraid to move or speak, nor yet one that would cheek him in his own house."

"I understand."

"He is a man who possesses an unlimited extent of



[JACK SHEPPARD RESCUING THE SHROUDMAKER.]

power; therefore it is to the advantage of everyone to keep on the right side of him! He allows me to make freer with him than anyone else, but even I am careful."

"Oh!"

"Look, here is his house. This is his door. Now, Jack, don't forget to bear in mind what I have told you. If he is pleased with you, he will engage you at once."

"Don't be afraid."

"I tell you for your own good," said Blueskin, producing a key from his pocket, with which he opened the street-door of Wild's house. "Come in."

Jack stepped into the hall with a confident air.

But, although Blueskin could thus at pleasure enter Wild's house, yet it was none the less guarded. Taking pattern by the prisons, to which Wild's house altogether bore a strong resemblance, he had a man stationed at each door of any importance, whose duty it was to see that

none passed the portal except those who had a right to do so.

This office was taken in turns by Wild's men, and the man at the post was termed "on the lock."

Tonks was "on the lock" on this occasion.

Poor Tonks, who had received such summary and condign punishment for daring to laugh at his august master!

He got up when he saw Blueskin enter.

He put his hand to his back with a rueful and piteous air as he hobbled forward, making many a strange grimace the while.

Apparently Jack saw in it the elements of something mirthful, for he laughed unrestrainedly.

Tonks scowled at him.

"Ha! ha! you may laugh, my young spark! Some time or other you'll know what it is to laugh on the wrong side of your face. Curse you! Oh—o—oh! Murder! The devil!"

A sudden accession of pain in the region of Tonks's back made him utter these sudden cries and twist himself into sundry curious shapes.

"This way," said Blueskin. "You'd better mind what you're at, or you'll find yourself in the same state as he is."

"What's the matter?"

"Oh! he offended Mr. Wild this morning."

"Well!"

"So Jonathan gave him two smacks with his bludgeon—pet he calls it."

Jack whistled.

"Oh! that's Mr. Wild, is it? Now, what did he do to offend him?"

"Laughed!"

"Eh? What? Oh! gammon. You don't mean to say he had that for laughing?"

"I do though; but silence! This is Mr. Wild's room. Don't say another word."

Blueskin tapped with his knuckles upon the panel of the door.

Jack was not quite at ease.

He drew an unfavourable conclusion with regard to Jonathan's character, from the fact that he had maltreated one of his men for such an offence.

Fain would he, if he had the power, have drawn back.

But a harsh, inarticulate growl, which might be translated into "Come in!" arose from the other side of the door.

Blueskin opened it at once and beckoned Jack.

Jonathan Wild was in pretty much the same position as he was when we saw him last—that is to say, seated at the table smoking his pipe, and occasionally solacing himself with a draught somewhat stronger than water, which stood on the table before him.

He had taken off his hat and wig.

His hideous physiognomy, with its numerous scars and patches, was therefore displayed to the greatest perfection.

He glanced at the new comer with some surprise.

Blueskin walked up to the table.

Jack Sheppard crossed the room, and, taking off his hat, made Jonathan a bow, in which respect, dread, and insolence were curiously mingled.

Wild's dog rose from the hearth, and looked up into Jack's face with a dubious glance.

Jonathan acknowledged Jack's bow by removing his long clay pipe from his mouth.

Blueskin, with an amount of familiarity which no one else dare assume, filled a glass from Jonathan's bottle.

He held it half-way to his lips.

"Mr. Wild," he said, "I have to-day a great and unexpected pleasure, one that I"—

"Ya—ah!"

Wild was getting impatient.

"I have the pleasure, Mr. Wild, of introducing to your favourable notice the only son of my esteemed comrade, Tom Sheppard."

Jack made another bow.

Blueskin took a sip from the glass.

"Tom Sheppard, the creaksman?" ejaculated Wild, looking at Jack with growing interest. "Tom Sheppard, the creaksman?"

"The very same, Mr. Wild," said Blueskin, "he's been driven from his master, and wants you to take him into your service."

Jack made a third bow to confirm the truth of what Blueskin had advanced, but he did not speak.

Wild was conciliated.

He filled a glass and pushed it towards Jack.

"Very glad to see you," he said, in as amiable tones as he could assume. "Act square, and then all's right, ain't it, Blue?"

"It is, Mr. Wild. And as for my friend Jack here, I can answer for him. He'll turn out a great man, Mr. Wild, I am sure of it."

"Ya—ah! What's he going to do? Father's business, a—?"

"Exactly, Mr. Wild. I'll put him up to it."

"Ah, do! Does he know the conditions?"

"Not yet, Mr. Wild."

"Oh!"

"I thought it best not to say anything about it till I

had brought him before you, and found whether you were inclined to take him into your service."

"Right," said Jonathan, approvingly. "Then I'll tell him myself, eh?"

"If you don't mind the trouble, Mr. Wild, it would, perhaps, be quite as well."

Artful Blue.

Those were the speeches Wild delighted to hear.

And he knew it.

"Sit down, then," said Jonathan, graciously. "Fill up your glasses, and then we'll talk business."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Jack drew up a chair to the table, and sat down in it with a careless air, as though he felt quite at home.

The glasses were filled to the brim, and Wild relighted his pipe.

He turned towards Jack.

"Ah! well," he said, "you've heard what my lieutenant has said about you! What's your name?"

"Jack, Mr. Wild."

"Well, Jack, and you're quite willing to assist me, eh?"

"I am," said Jack, "and I hope you'll prove a better master than my last was."

"That will depend entirely upon yourself. Who was your master?"

"John Roots."

"The carpenter of Wych-street?"

"That's him."

"I know him," said Wild, "and so you were his apprentice?"

"I was, but I was forced to run away, and then I met my father's old friend, who told me he would bring me to you, Mr. Wild."

"Oh! A-hem! Have you seen much of the world, Jack?"

"There are many who have seen more."

"Of course. But has your experience showed you that the world is divided into two portions?"

"Rather!" said Jack. "Rich and poor."

"Ya—ah!"

"Is that wrong, Mr. Wild?"

Jonathan looked at him contemptuously.

"You're a babby!" he said, "a green sucking babby!"

This was touching Jack upon a vulnerable spot.

He jumped up off his chair.

It was his ambition—his vanity—to be thought a man.

Such is generally the case with young men of a boyish aspect, as Jack was.

"Ya—ah!" said Jonathan, whose choler began to rise.

"What do you mean?"

"Sit down, Jack," said Blueskin. "It's all right. Don't be a fool. You made a little mistake, that's all. You didn't understand Mr. Wild. Sit down again, and he will explain."

Thus persuaded, Jack resumed his seat.

"I thought you hadn't cut your wisdom teeth yet!" continued Jonathan, "but you are a lad of spirit, I can see."

"You make no mistake there, Mr. Wild."

"Hold your row, Blue, and let me talk to Jack here. Well, as I said, the world is divided into two unequal portions—those who rob, and those who are robbed."

"I see."

"It is quite evident you must be one or the other, but it appears to me you have not had the privilege of making your choice."

"That's just it, Mr. Wild," said Jack, with the least tinge of sadness in his words. "They won't believe I am honest."

"Of course not; so the best thing you can do is to make them right. You will never be forgiven if you don't."

Jack was silent.

"Now," pursued Wild, who was certainly either in a most temperate mood that afternoon, or else, with that keen eye of his, had seen the value such an adherent as Jack would be to him, "you have only this to do—act square."

"In what, Mr. Wild?"

"Business, of course. If you get anything bring it to me, and I will buy it of you at a fair price, but if you attempt to set up in business on your own account, by taking your goods elsewhere, look out for your neck."

that's all. But, while you keep in with me, I'll promise you to get you out of all trouble. Do you understand?"

"I think I do, Mr. Wild," said Jack, bluntly. "You must get all you can, bring me the money, I'll pay you for it, and you shan't have anything to fear for the"—

Jack made an expressive gesture with his hand and his neck.

"That's it, Jack," interrupted Blueskin. "That's it. It don't take you long to see through a ladder. Ah! you'll turn out a great man one of these days! Fill up your glass, if you please, Mr. Wild, and drink to the health of JACK SHEPPARD!"

"Ya—ah! Shan't! Hold your row! Mind your own business!"

Then, turning to Jack, he said—

"You understand?"

"Quite."

"Be off, then, and be hanged to you both!"

CHAPTER XII.

JACK GETS AN INKLING OF A NICE LITTLE PLOT, WHICH HE DETERMINES TO FRUSTRATE.

UPON receipt of this gentle intimation that the interview was over, our friends withdrew.

They paused at the street door.

"What am I to do next?" asked Jack.

"Anything you like until twelve to-night, and then I will meet you at the 'Black Lion.' I intend to crack a crib to-night, and for you to go with me, just to get your hand in, you know."

"What time is it now?"

"Five minutes to six."

"I have, then, six hours to do what I please?"

"Just so. Six hours and five minutes. Take care of yourself, and mind you are there at the time."

"Trust me for that. But ain't Wild a rum bloke?"

"He is," said Blueskin, with a smile. "But I wouldn't advise you to let him hear you say it."

"No, no. Open the door. I'll be off."

"Away with you. Recollect the 'Black Lion' at twelve!"

The door of Jonathan Wild's house was banged after him.

Jack ran down the steps into Newgate-street.

There he paused.

"What am I to do now?" he asked. "Walk about, I suppose. I wonder what they call this? Is it destiny, I wonder? Only just think what extraordinary things have happened since I left old Roots yesterday! Ah! well, as Jonathan said, I was born to prey upon society, so what's the good of trying to contend against fate, eh?"

All notions of right and wrong were not yet extinct in Jack's breast, and so he called sophistry to aid him to persevere in the course he had marked out.

Although the hour was an early one, yet it was growing quite dark.

Indeed, that evening it was dusk at least an hour before its usual time, for the sky was completely covered with thick black clouds.

It seemed to promise to be a favourable night for the business in which Jack was to be engaged.

He was rather at a loss, however, to know how to pass the time until the hour of his appointment.

He sauntered slowly down Snow-hill, and so on into Holborn, then a very different thoroughfare to what it is now.

When night came it was very badly illuminated indeed, since all the light there was proceeded from flickering oil lamps, suspended for the most part on ropes, which stretched from one side of the street to the other.

When Jack reached Middle-row he turned into a small public-house. He thought to wait there would be preferable to idling about the streets.

But one person was in the taproom when he entered.

His age might have been guessed at forty.

His attire was rich, but very plain.

The sword, too, which he had unbuckled from his side, and laid upon the table before him, was beautifully fashioned, and such as was worn only by gentlemen of distinction.

Jack noted this before he took his seat.

He called then for refreshment, and, as he sat there, more leisurely examined the appearance of this gentle-

man, who, when Jack entered, had just glanced up at him and no more.

An indefinable curiosity to know who he was took possession of Jack Sheppard, who was naturally of an inquisitive disposition.

Yet why he felt an interest in this stranger he could not tell, unless it was that his mind just then required some occupation.

"I should like to know who he is," he thought, "and what brings him here, and I will, too. I'll find it out. It will just be something to do until twelve o'clock. There is something going on, I know, or the likes of him would not be in a place of this sort. I'll keep my eye upon him."

And so he did.

Not to all appearance, though, for he feigned to be gazing listlessly at the wall before him.

But Jack's sight was keen.

Not the slightest movement of the stranger was unnoticed by him.

He saw, too, that his face was far from being a pleasing one.

There was a restless movement about the eyes that betokened suspicion and distrust, perhaps even treachery.

His form was rather inclined to corpulency. His face was full, and his cheeks puffy.

In accordance with the fashion of the time, he wore upon his head a peruke.

Near his hand was a bottle of wine, to which he paid frequent attention.

Presently he rose, and walked with a hurried step up and down the room.

At length he paused before the window, and looked out.

Jack felt more and more convinced that something was going on, and though certainly it was no business of his, yet he determined to find out all about it.

The stranger stood at the window for about twenty seconds.

Then, with a gesture of impatience, he turned away, and sat down again.

He played nervously with the trappings of his sword, and his lips moved rapidly.

But what he said Jack could not tell.

Then, from some under portion of his apparel, he produced a watch, so thickly studded with diamonds that it actually seemed to emit little rays of light.

This gave Jack's thoughts a new turn.

"I should just like to know," he thought, "what old Jonathan would give for a thing of that sort? I've half a mind to take it and try, and I will, too!"

That was rather a difficult thing to determine upon, for, after just glancing at the dial, the stranger hastily put it back in an inner pocket, and drew his waistcoat over it, which then were made almost as long as the coats themselves.

With an indifference, which was most assuredly affected, the stranger leaned his back against the wall, and closed his eyes.

But his hands still played restlessly with the sword hilt.

"Now, I would bet anyone a guinea," said Jack, mentally, "that he has got an appointment here with some one, and either he is here too early, or his friend is behind his time."

Scarcely had Jack made this reflection than he heard a hasty footstep in the passage without.

The next moment the door opened, and a man hurried into the room.

It was plain enough to be seen that his rank in life was much lower than the stranger's, for, though he had the air of a confidant, yet his demeanour was respectful in the extreme.

He removed his hat, nor did he venture to sit down until the other waved his hand for him to do so.

Jack strained his hearing to the utmost, but what the new comer had to say was uttered in so low a tone that nothing more than a humming, murmuring sound made its way to where Jack was.

Then he observed that anxious and suspicious glances were cast upon him.

He was a bar to their conversation.

But Jack did not mind that.

Suddenly, however, the stranger banged the bottom of

the bottle, from which he had been drinking, on to the table.

A girl appeared in answer to the summons.

"Where is your master?" asked the stranger, in an imperious voice.

This was the first time Jack had heard him speak, and he paid particular attention to the intonation.

There was something so peculiar about it that he felt sure, let him hear it under what circumstances he might, he should be sure to recognize it.

"He is in the bar, sir," said the girl timidly, for the way in which he had spoken had awed her.

"Tell him to come hither, then; I want him!"

"How uncommon polite he is in his manner of speaking, to be sure," muttered Jack.

The landlord of the public-house entered hastily, wiping his hands upon his apron.

"You sent for me, sir, I believe," he said. "What is it you require?"

"A private room, if there is such a thing to be had in the house. I will pay you for it."

"Of course, sir—of course! I am sorry, sir, but the only private room we have"—

"Is engaged, I suppose," said the stranger, rising.

"No, sir—oh! no, sir, I was not going to say engaged, but it is upstairs, sir, if you please, if that will be no objection!"

"None in the least—none in the least. All the better."

"Very good, sir, would you please to step this way. It's the room just over this one, sir, and we use it to sit in ourselves."

The landlord, who was inclined to be rather morigerous, preceded his guests out of the tap-room.

Jack listened to their receding footsteps along the passage, and then heard them ascend the stairs.

"Confound them all. What do they mean by baulking me in that fashion. But I'll be even with them, I'll bet. I don't know how it is, but I feel uncommonly desirous of knowing what it is they have got to say to each other. Some rascality, evidently, or they would not be so afraid of being overheard."

Jack emptied his glass and looked up at the grimy ceiling.

"The room just over this, is it? How in the world, now am I to hear what they say? I must make haste if I am to do it, or they will be done. I can't hear where I am, that's quite clear, and as for going up-stairs, why that might be awkward; besides I don't know where they are. Ha! there's some one coming down. I'll listen."

Jack jumped up and ran to the door.

"Oh! it's the landlord, I suppose, coming down again. Why the stairs must be just on the other side of the passage, surely."

In another moment Jack heard the landlord reach the floor.

Then a door closed.

"I'll do it," said Jack. "I'll do it, and risk the consequences. They had better not interfere with me, that's all."

He projected his head a little way into the passage.

An oil-lamp, which burnt in that dim fashion incidental to all oil-lamps, so far from lighting up the place, only confused it with the numerous shadows which it cast.

Jack looked both up and down the passage.

No one was visible.

His hearing had not deluded him. There, on the opposite side to where he stood, and a few feet lower down, was the staircase.

"There's nobody about," said Jack, "no one at all: so here goes."

He crossed the passage and sprang up the staircase like a ghost.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK SHEPPARD ENDANGERS HIS LIFE THROUGH MEDDLING WITH MATTERS THAT DON'T CONCERN HIM.

It was most certainly very daring of Jack to run up the stairs in that manner, but he did not pause to reflect that he was going the right way to get his head into trouble.

Up he went.

The stairs were dark and steep, but without once stumbling he gained the top.

He was rather perplexed then what to do.

He could positively see nothing, for the staircase had no windows.

There was only one thing to be done.

Placing his hand against the wall, and feeling his way along it, Jack crept forward.

When he had proceeded in this manner about half-a-dozen steps a fresh and apparently insuperable difficulty arose.

He could hear some one coming upstairs.

What was to be done?

Advance he dared not, since he had no idea what was before him.

There appeared to be no hiding place.

Jack was nonplussed.

Before he could recover from his bewilderment sufficiently to think a little, whoever it was that was coming had got almost to the top of the stairs.

Then Jack saw the reflection of a light.

Then the jingling of glasses.

"Oh! hang it all, what shall I do?" he said. "It's the landlord, I know, bringing them something to drink, and a candle! It's all up with this job, for he'll see me, of course. It's aggravating not to be able to do what you make up your mind to, but it can't be helped. Eh! yes it can! dear me! stop now!"

These incoherent sentences meant that as he put his hand against the wall he felt a door.

His first impulse was to turn the handle, but he immediately saw how impolitic such a proceeding would be, so he paused.

Likely enough it was the door of the very room in which the two visitors were, and if so, the act of opening it would be to insure immediate discovery.

But there was no time to be lost.

He listened at the door.

Not the faintest murmur reached his ears.

"They cannot be in here, surely," he said, "or else I should hear voices. There is nothing else to be done. I'll chance it!"

Jack turned the knob, and found the door open to his hand.

All was darkness within.

"Here goes," he muttered. "I must chance it now!"

So saying, he slipped inside the room, and closed the door silently.

He heard the landlord in the passage.

To his surprise, too, he could hear quite plainly the murmuring of voices.

Still he did not venture to stir. He waited until his eyes had become familiar with the darkness.

The landlord passed the door of the room in which he had so opportunely taken refuge.

But he heard him open another, very close indeed to it.

At the same moment he heard a voice, which he identified as the first stranger's, say—

"Now, landlord, quick! You have been a long time gone; I don't like to be left in the dark."

Jack was not a little astonished at the plainness where-with he heard what was said. He could scarcely believe that he was not in the same room with the speakers.

And then he noticed, as he turned his face in the direction whence the sounds came, that a few rays of light found their way in, and to some slight extent assisted him to define several objects.

"It's a partition," said Jack, to himself. "Bravo! Fate is in favour of me, clearly. I shall, without the least trouble in the world, hear every word they say without any one being a bit the wiser; that is," he added, "if no one comes in here bothering."

"That will do, that will do," Jack heard the stranger say impatiently. "You can leave us now, and mind that we are not disturbed."

"Yes, sir, I'll take care of that, sir! If you should want anything you will find a hand-bell on the tray."

Jack heard the door close, and the landlord, after traversing the passage, descend the stairs.

Feeling then a little more secure, he adventured with most cautious footsteps to draw yet nearer to the screen, or partition that divided the two rooms the one from the other.

To do this the utmost caution was necessary.

Should he by any accident come in contact with any one of the many articles of furniture there might be in the room, a sound would be produced.

The result of that sound would be his discovery.

Therefore Jack, with a tread as silent as a cat's, made his way slowly forward.

The mode in which he did so was strange.

He crouched down and held out his arms as far as possible in advance of him.

Then, little by little, he crawled across the room.

A carpet was laid upon the floor, and this was wonderfully in his favour.

But the apartment was of no very great extent, so that, although his rate of progression was slow, yet it took but a few seconds for him to reach the partition.

We have said that there were several crevices in this partition, and that through them a few straggling beams of light found their way.

They stretched in long pencils across the floor.

Seeing this, Jack thought there was, if he drew nearer, a chance of his not only being an auditor of the interview between the two guests, but a spectator also.

In this anticipation he was disappointed.

The chinks were not wide enough for him to see through.

He must, therefore, be content with hearing what was going to take place.

In order to do this most conveniently he seated himself on the floor, as close to the screen as he dared, without risking discovery.

It would seem in the short space of time which ensued after the landlord closed the door, and while Jack acted and reflected as we have recorded, that the occupants of the private room did no more than pour out and drink some portion of the wine which had been brought them. Certainly no word was uttered by either of them.

As secrecy appeared so important a desideratum in their conference, it is probable enough they were silent for this brief period in order to make sure that the landlord actually passed down the passage and descended the stairs.

Jack waited now very anxiously for them to speak.

He was not long kept in suspense.

A chair was moved uneasily upon the floor.

Then the first stranger spoke. Jack knew it was him for there was something so uncommon in his intonation that, once heard, it would ever afterwards be recognized.

"And so, Steggs, you are quite sure you are right—made no mistake—eh?"

"None at all, your lordship. I have been careful in the extreme."

"That is well!"

"I am glad," said the man who had been called by the rather peculiar name of Steggs, "I am glad that your lordship thinks that what I have done is well."

The tones were fawning and servile in the extreme.

No great amount of penetration was required to see in what position he stood with the whom he had called "your lordship."

"Well now, as there is no time to lose, Steggs, and as we are entirely free from the fear of being overheard, state as simply as you can, what you have discovered and done, so that an ultimate plan of operations may be resolved upon."

"I will, your lordship. In obedience to your commands, I set out this morning to make inquiries relative to the truth of the statement that had been made to your lordship, that your brother's daughter, whom all thought dead, was alive."

"Yes—yes. I know all that. Go on—go on."

"I am going on, your lordship; only I understood that I was to mention the whole of the particulars; but that is a little error on my part which I must intreat your lordship to forget."

"Never mind—never mind. Proceed."

"I went to Prince's-street, Little Turnstile, as you directed. It is a most horrible place, my lord. Faugh! it makes me quite sick to think about it."

There was a jingling of glasses for a moment as though Mr. Steggs was so overcome that he was compelled to have recourse to the wine.

"It was to No. 16 I went. It is a miserable, runous tenement, but a large one, and in the occupation of many persons."

"Yes—yes."

"I will pass over the difficulties I had in ascertaining, without asking the direct question, what portion of the house Mrs. Roblet occupied, but briefly say it was a large room on the top floor."

"So far, then, the statement was corroborated."

"Yes, my lord, and even much further. You were told Mrs. Roblet gained a livelihood by making shrouds, and such I found actually the case."

"Yes. And did you find that—that?"

"She employed girls to assist her in their manufacture? I did, my lord. Sometimes, when trade was good, she had as many as twelve or fourteen; but now she employs only one."

"Ah! and that one?"

"Is a girl who lives somewhere in the purlieus of Drury-lane. She is miserably poor, for work performed by women is rarely well remunerated; but in spite of her poverty she is clean and neatly dressed, while an air of good breeding pervades her every action, and is quite sufficient to show even the most casual observer that there is noble blood in her veins."

"Indeed—is it so?"

"It is, my lord; and that she is the daughter of your lordship's brother there cannot, I think, be the shadow of a doubt."

A sudden movement, as though his lordship had started to his feet, made itself heard, and then a hurried striding up and down the room.

"Confound your caution, Steggs," muttered Jack, "why couldn't you have just said whose daughter she was, eh?"

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK RESOLVES UPON THE FRUSTRATION OF HIS LORDSHIP'S DELECTABLE PLOT.

JACK SHEPPARD was completely carried away by the intense feeling of interest which the fragmentary conversation created in his breast, and he was quite wild to think the man Steggs had been so near letting out the name of this girl's father, and then after all had not done so.

His lordship paced up and down the room for full five minutes, and then he flung himself into a chair.

Mr. Steggs was silent.

He was waiting to be spoken to.

Jack could hear his own heart go thump, thump, thump, against his breast with most alarming violence.

He felt afraid it would be heard.

But that dread was soon overcome, for he heard again his lordship address Mr. Steggs.

He was evidently greatly agitated.

"What is to be done, Steggs?" he said, "what is to be done? Do not be afraid to speak. You know that you and I have no secrets from each other. You tell me that you can entertain no reasonable doubt about what Williams stated on his death-bed being true, namely that the—little child had been spared by him instead of—well—well—you know."

"There can be no doubt of its truth, my lord. Everything, so far from invalidating his confession, tends only to confirm it. He told you he had disobeyed your orders. That the child, instead of quitting this world, had been placed by him in a family in Charles-street, Drury-lane. That he had watched over her all his life, and that at present she was occupied by an old woman named Roblet as a shroud maker."

"And you have found all these details correct, you say?"

"Every one of them."

"As you have said, then, there is no room for doubt, what is to be done Steggs, what is to be done?"

Again his lordship jumped up from his chair, and paced up and down the room.

"Something, your lordship, must be done, for, of course, you don't wish all the estates to pass out of your hands into this girl's, as they assuredly would by the conditions of your brother's will. It was her disappearance, mysterious as it was, which shortened his days, and you know the clause which he inserted to be acted upon in the event of her ever being found. What do you think, my lord?"

"Think, Steggs? I asked you to think. What is it?"

that must be done? that something must be I know full well."

"If I should advise, my lord, I should say get rid of her. Put it out of her power to ever appear and prove her identity."

"No, no, Steggs, I have been bad enough—am bad enough—but I could not deliberately plan the murder of a young and beautiful girl; you said that she was beautiful, Steggs, did you not?"

"I did, my lord."

"I could not do it, Steggs, I could not do it."

"Do what?"

"Murder her!"

"Then," muttered Jack, between his teeth, "you are not quite so bad as I took you for, and I am glad of it."

"Surely your lordship never contemplated such a thing. It would be hazardous in the extreme. Fools only think of disposing of a person by murder! A thousand things arise to cause detection. The disappearance of the victim, the insuperable difficulties there are in the way of getting rid of a body when the life has been removed; all these, my lord, combine to make murder out of the question."

"I am glad of that, very glad. But how is she to be got rid of?"

"The modes are numerous. It remains for you to choose whichever you may consider the safest and the best."

"Speak out, then," said his lordship, resuming his seat. "You are craftier than I am. Speak out: Tell me the one which, in your politic brain, you think most likely to succeed."

There was a moment's silence.

The interest with which Jack continued to listen to this conference is indescribable.

Already he could see that a scheme of deep villany was afoot, of which all that he had heard was but the induction, and his impatience to know what it was the man Steggs would propose was painful in the extreme.

He was at no loss to gather from the conversation he had heard a succinct account of the whole affair.

The elder brother of the man who was addressed by Steggs as my lord, had evidently possessed some valuable estates.

His sole heiress was his daughter, and to her was everything bequeathed.

But his younger brother coveted the estates.

A child was all that prevented him from having them.

This child he had caused to be abducted by a man named Williams, to whom he had given instructions to destroy its life.

But on his deathbed this man confessed the truth, and pointed out where the girl could be found, as he imagined, to the man Steggs, who had made the younger brother acquainted with his dying statement, and had sided with him to keep the property from its lawful owner.

This was simply the state of the case.

But already had Jack determined to frustrate this plan, let it be what it might.

Hence his anxiety and impatience to know what Steggs would utter next.

At last he spoke.

His voice was low and cold.

"My lord," he said, "we will start with a disputable proposition, and that is, that it lies in the power of two persons, acting in concert, to take away with impunity the life of a third party."

"Is this so?"

"Assuredly. Well is justice represented blind, since her decrees are as fallible as they well could be."

"But what is it that is to be done?" again asked his lordship. "Time passes. What would you do?"

"Make her a felon!"

"A felon?"

"Yes, a felon."

"But how can such a thing be done?"

"There is no difficulty in finding the means. It can be done, and, my lord, you will be safe."

"Indeed! How so?"

"Can it be possible your lordship is unacquainted with the circumstance that by the laws of England a felon—a convicted felon—can never succeed to an inheritance?"

"True! I was aware, but had forgotten it. I see now, Steggs. You would get her convicted—transported—and trouble no more in the matter."

"Precisely so, your lordship. Do you approve of my plan of action?"

"It is a devilish one."

"Your lordship flatters me."

"God forbid! No, no, Steggs, your plan is good, unquestionably, but it has one fault."

"One fault?"

"Yes; it is too intricate."

Steggs was silent.

"And not only that, too tedious. Setting aside the trouble there would be to get up and sustain a case that would entail conviction, think, in the meantime, what a many chances there might be of all being discovered. No, no, Steggs, that will not do."

"I am sorry you think so, your lordship. But what is it you yourself advise?"

"Some plan involving promptitude of action—something that can be put into execution and completed in half-an-hour."

"Boldness and rapidity are good qualities in a scheme, but the risk is always so much increased."

"I think the risk could scarcely be greater than the one you have proposed. In that there are so many circumstances, and all so dependent upon one another, that, like some long chain by which a prisoner is descending from a fearful height, should one link be imperfect, destruction would be inevitable."

"You are right, then, my lord, but I think it possible to make every link perfect. Still, what is it you propose?"

"This," said his lordship. "You say you know the place where she is employed?"

"I do."

"It is close by here, is it not?"

"Scarce ten minutes' walk."

"It wants now just that much of nine. Look here, Steggs. At such an hour as this, it is probable she will be making her way homewards."

"Quite so, your lordship."

"Then take me there at once."

"What would you do?"

"Let us both set upon her and bear her off to a place of security. Her ultimate fate will depend upon herself."

"Then," said Steggs, "if such is your determination, and it is to be carried out to-night, we must leave here this moment."

"So much the better. Come, then, lead me to her work-place. We will wait there for her to come out. We can manage between us to stifle her cries, and put her into a hackney-coach!"

"It can be done," said Steggs. "The spot, too, is most favourable, for after dark it is most lonely. As of course you are aware, it is close to Lincoln's Inn-fields, and, to reach her home, she will have to pass down Gate-street and Duke-street."

"Precisely so."

"That, then, will be the place. It is a thousand chances if any one is in sight or hearing."

The door was flung open, and the worthy couple descended the stairs, in order to set out on their nefarious errand.

"Thank goodness!" said Jack, scrambling to his feet, "I can put a stop to that."

CHAPTER XV.

JACK SHEPPARD MAKES A FRIEND WHO CLINGS TO HIM THROUGH LIFE.

It was very easy for Jack Sheppard to come to such a determination, but we think he was so much carried away by what he heard, that he did not perceive all the obstacles he would have to overcome.

His sympathies, as almost every one else's would have been, were strongly enlisted in favour of the poor shroud-maker, who had such unscrupulous enemies as his lordship and his man Steggs.

But it was very certain no amount of personal peril would deter Jack from making a desperate attempt to rescue the young girl from their hands.

With this resolve, he hastened to the head of the stairs, and waited.

Waited until he thought they had had time enough to

The coast was clear.

Nonetheless, and scarcely daring to breathe, the two

men, as the message was quite simple. The two men like Eulburg like a snail, and though looked carefully up and down, no trace of the young man's baggage was visible.

But Jack knew their destination.

There were very few, indeed, who were never acquainted with the man and a lot of first looking down Jack, as he dived down several of the house-looking windows, and in a short time entered the man's den at the east side.

Here all was as dark as it was possible in a place of the kind. No public lamps illuminated it, and the two men themselves sent forth not a single beam of light from any of their numerous windows.

Without relaxing his speed, and with the reasonable conjectured would be greater than that made by the two pickpockets, he ran along the pavement until the corner of Gate-street was reached.

Here was a narrow old lamp, which, in a feeble and gusty way, dispelled the darkness for about a foot around it.

It was hung in the fashion very common there—that is to say, it was suspended from the centre of a rope stretching from one side of the street to the other.

Jack came to a halt and looked carefully about him.

There was but one passenger in sight, and he was but a mere boy, who chose to cheat himself into the belief that he was not imperilled in the least by wandering in extraordinary time, as loudly as the condition of his attire would allow him.

Along Gate-street a game, and then turning round the corner of the iron railings, passed and Great Queen-street.

Now, Jack had often been in that direction during the day and had noticed that one of the iron railings had been displaced, and he had more than once, for the next time of the thing, squeezed his slender anatomy through the aperture.

It now occurred to him that a more suitable place for him to conceal himself from observation could not be found.

He accordingly entered the inclosure.

Then he heard the clock in the old square peal forth in its peculiar jangling way the hour of nine.

Clearly, then, he had lost no time.

But the last stroke had hardly died away, he heard some vehicle approaching.

Most probably one that had been engaged to carry off the young snout-maker, with whom Jack felt, although he had not once seen her, that he was deeply in love.

The carriage stopped about a dozen paces from the corner of the street.

Then Jack's keen vision enabled him to see two persons descend from it, and advance towards the place where he had hidden himself.

For a moment the idea took possession of his mind that they had determined upon secreting themselves where he himself was.

As they approached he could distinguish the tones of their voices.

They were his lordship and Steggs.

"This is the place, my lord," he heard the latter say. "Let us take up our positions near the railing here, and as soon as the passage we will spring out upon her."

"Very well, Steggs," I think that will do. The coachman, I suppose, will not be near enough to notice it."

"Not he, your lordship." I know him well, for I have had occasion to employ him before now. He is quite deaf and very stupid."

"Hark! silence! Back, back! Can you not hear some one?"

The lordship clutched his companion by the arm and held him back.

Both were silent.

Distinctly all three heard—for Jack was within arms' length of them—a light and rapid footstep.

"It is she! It is she!" whispered his lordship.

"I cannot be sure of that," returned Steggs. "But I have seen her before, and should recognize her again by her attire. Good back, my lord! Whoever it is will have it pass under your oil lamp, and then I shall be able to

see for certain. It will be plenty of time to possess upon her. You must assist me, my lord, and so with such

caution, and then all will be well."

"Will it?" thought Jack as he uttered in his sleeve. "I don't know about that. In my part, I hardly think it will be so easy, as you imagine."

He prepared himself for instantaneous action.

Noise and motion came the next, which was certainly a fortunate one.

Jack strained his eyes to the utmost—a squinted his head between the railings.

One second more, and then he saw by the light of the lamp a girl wearing one of those pretty and becoming

was then in motion, and a wistful, though near attire.

Momentary as was the glimpse which he obtained, he saw all this and more besides, for he likewise noticed that the lamp was perfect and not yet

but at the same instant did Steggs say—

"That is your niece, my lord," and with a strong effort as if animated by one impulse.

A faint scream of surprise issued from the young girl's lips, and then she found herself a prisoner.

But she struggled desperately, and called for help in a voice so musical that Jack felt sure there was nothing to

begeth with it.

An extraordinary noise in the

He made a frantic effort to pass through the railings.

When he found in his nervous haste, he had mistaken the place, and that he was trying to force a way through a place not above four inches wide.

A quick, however, discovered his mistake, and was through for good like a shot.

But, brief as was the delay thus had caused, yet so prompt were the two villains in their actions, that they had succeeded in dragging the young girl some distance.

But Jack, uttering a loud shout which, coming as unexpectedly upon the two abductors as it did, filled them with a momentary panic, sprang forward like a tiger.

With one blow he felled Steggs to the ground.

Then he grappled with his lordship, and a desperate struggle ensued.

The young girl suddenly found herself free as suddenly as she had found herself a captive.

Indeed the two were followed at once, and she was so bewildered, that she in vain tried to separate the two from each other.

Her first impulse was, naturally, flight.

But Jack found breath and sufficient presence of mind to call about to her to stand at a little distance.

His words arrested her, and she stood in a charming attitude as though in the act of running.

Feeling at having his well-learned scheme so interrupted, and his lordship's double strength, and he struggled with Jack's great ferocity.

Then Steggs recovered from the blow he had received.

He raised himself a little to one arm, and cautiously drew his sword from its scabbard.

He was in hopes of taking Jack in unawares.

But he was mistaken.

His movements were seen, and Jack, watching in opportunity, dealt him such a fearful kick in the ribs that he was once more prostrated.

But, however successful this and might have been, so far as concerned the person at whom it was dealt, yet it had one bad effect, for it enabled his lordship to gain a slight advantage.

But, with a sudden and fresh exertion of strength, Jack sprang upon him with one hand by the collar, while with the other he struck with great violence upon his face.

This was more than his lordship could stand.

His head of Jack relaxed.

Concentrating then all his strength into one blow, Jack struck his lordship in the face, and down he went, as though felled with a sledge hammer.

Such a dead weight as a human head is—can did upon Steggs, who was just then in the act of making a second attempt to regain his feet.

Both then, strangely mingled together, lay motionless.

With the use only of such weapons as nature had pro-

vided him with, had Jack gained a complete victory over two well-armed men, who were each, so far as all appearance went, more than a match for a stripling such as Sheppard was.

But the contest had disturbed the residents.

Many windows were now thrown open, while scores of eager tongues inquired what was the matter.

But for the most part, seeing that it was only a street brawl, and such as often happened two or three times in a night, they withdrew their heads and slammed the windows after them.

A rattle was sprung, and the tramp of approaching footsteps sounded clearly on the night air.

But, not heeding them, Jack turned towards the young girl whom he had so signally befriended.

CHAPTER XVI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COMMIT A BURGLARY AT "THE GRANGE."

"FEAR nothing now!" he said, for he found she was trembling violently. "The danger has passed away. It was greater, perhaps, than you have any conception of. All is well now, but, so that you may be secured from another attack, I will accompany you to where you live. First, however, stay where you are a moment, so that I may see how far your assailants are injured."

The young girl, after making a great effort, spoke.

Her voice trembled very much, but that only had the effect of imparting to its musical accents a new charm.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," she said, "much obliged. I had no idea I had an enemy in the world. Surely I must have been mistaken for some one else."

"Not a bit of it," said Jack.

"But I will not give you any further trouble, sir, or trespass further on your kindness. Do not, I pray, let me trespass upon you any longer. I feel that already I owe you an obligation which I can never repay."

"Oh, stuff about repaying; but if you really do feel grateful for what I have done, stand where you are a moment, while I look at your two foes."

As he spoke, Jack hastened towards the individual whom he knew only by the name of "your lordship," and the rascal Steggs.

He rightly enough concluded that the young girl would not resist the request he had made in such terms.

She remained quite still.

The springing of rattles increased.

In the distance a lantern could be seen flashing through the gloom.

Jack stooped over his prostrate foes.

They both lay as immovable as though life were quite extinct.

"I will astonish Blue and Johny," muttered Jack. "Blest if I don't. It will only be right to see what his lordship has in his pockets, and I am determined to have that capital-looking watch of his."

With great dexterity Jack unbuttoned the huge waistcoat which "his lordship" had put on over his ordinary apparel.

With equal featness he transferred the gold watch and its long thick chain and seals to his own pockets.

But with the exception of a purse containing a few sovereigns and some silver, that was all in the shape of valuables which his lordship had about him.

This disappointed Jack.

He was in hopes and expectation of finding something about his person that would give a clue to his identity.

But nothing of the kind could he find.

His lordship had been crafty enough to remove everything that might tend to show who he was.

So Jack, to his chagrin, was compelled to go without knowing who the young girl's uncle was.

The discovery of his name would he knew be all important.

But when he had thoroughly searched all his pockets, and was assured that what he sought was not to be found, Jack consoled himself with the reflection, that in a few hours, an account of the assault would be made public.

As for Steggs, he disdained to trouble any further with him.

There was but little likelihood of his finding anything in his pockets worth the trouble of taking.

He hastened, therefore, to the spot where he had left the young girl he had rescued.

But at the same moment that he reached her side a watchman reached it also.

He was flourishing his lantern, and rattle in a maniacal fashion.

He had come from the direction of Queen-street.

Other watchmen were hurrying to the scene from Holborn way.

With great rapidity Jack reasoned in this wise.

If he chose to go down Queen-street there would be no one to oppose him, provided the watchman who had just come from there was put out of the way.

It was, too, just the route he wished to take.

To the great astonishment of the watchman Jack dodged behind the girl, and hit him a tremendous blow on the ear.

So effective was it, that, without uttering a sound, the watchman measured his full length upon the stones.

"That will complicate matters, I rather think," said Jack.

Then, taking the young girl by the hand, he added, hurriedly—

"Now, my dear, if ever you ran before, run now, for your life depends upon your getting away from here at once! Come along!"

So saying he set off at great speed.

The young girl, however, who to the full comprehended what he had said to her, kept up with him admirably.

Round the corner, along Queen-street, past Great Wild-street, and into Drury-lane, they sped like the wind.

Just opposite the top of Long-acre they paused for breath.

They listened.

But no sounds from pursuing footsteps came to their ears.

"I think we have done them," said Jack, triumphantly, for altogether he felt not a little proud of his night's work; "so now miss, if you will tell me where you live I will see you safely indoors."

His companion tried to speak.

But she could not.

She burst into a passionate flood of tears.

She sobbed, too, as though her heart would break.

Jack was alarmed.

Every one of those manifestations of distress went through his heart like a sword.

"Come, come, miss," he said, "don't cry in that way. There's nothing to be afraid of now, I can assure you. Cheer up, cheer up, do, and tell me where I am to take you."

Making a violent effort, the young girl checked her tears, and spoke to him.

"Nowhere," she said.

That was all.

Then she wept again, with even greater bitterness than before.

"Nowhere?" repeated Jack, in tones of great surprise, "nowhere? How is that? I thought you lived in Charles-street."

The girl wept more and more.

"Such is the case," she said. "At least I did live there—but," she added, interrupting herself suddenly, "how came you to know where I lived? I never saw you in my life before."

"I know that, but never mind just at present how I gained that information. Is it possible you live there no longer?"

"Alas! yes. My mother, who was the only relative I had in the world, is dead. She died the day before yesterday, and was buried to-day. We—we owed the people money for—rent, you understand, and as—I couldn't pay it—"

Her tears and sobs would suffer her to say no more.

"They turned you out into the street, eh?" said Jack. "Just like people—just like 'em"—as served just the same—exactly."

"You were?" said the young girl, feeling a fresh interest in her companion; "how strange!"

"Rather, but what were you going to do when you were stopped?"

"I cannot tell you, for I do not know. I had just



[BLUESKIN ATTACKED BY THE MASTIFF AT "THE GRANGE."]

come from Mrs. Roblet's, and she cannot pay me the money for the work I have done."

"That's awkward; but it appears to me I am in a position to do you further service still. I have no home of my own, but I have a friend, who for my sake will, I am sure, be glad to take charge of you."

"Oh! indeed—indeed!" said the young girl, "I cannot consent to place myself under any further obligations to you. You have already done too much."

"Too much? How can that be?"

"More than I can repay!"

"Oh! nonsense. I told you before never to mind about repayment. I would not accept anything more from you than a kind word, if you possessed all the wealth in the world."

"I am glad of that," said the shroudmaker, earnestly, "not only because I like to hear you say so, but because I am in a position to repay you."

"Very well, then. Now come with me. Believe me, it is most important for your own interests to do so. I

have something to tell you that will fill you with amazement!"

"What is it?"

"The motive which prompted those two men to make the attack they did upon you."

"Can you give it?"

"Most certainly."

"And is it true that I am really the person that was marked out for it? Are you sure there was no mistake?"

"I am. Quite sure."

"I should scarcely think it could be me! I know no one, and cannot conceive a reason for it. I feel confident they have made a mistake in the person."

"Well, if you are a young girl living in Charles-street?"

"Yes—yes!"

"A shroudmaker, and working for Mrs. Roblet, of 16, Princes-street, Lincoln's Inn-fields."

"I am—I do!"

"Then there is no mistake at all about it. It would take too long to tell you what I know while standing in

the street; besides, it would be unsafe to do so, for hark! I can quite plainly hear people in pursuit!"

The sounds filled the poor girl with terror, and already looking up to Jack as being able to defend her from all harm, she clung tightly to him for protection.

"Save me—oh! save me!" she said. "What will become of us; I am terrified to death."

"There is no occasion to be alarmed," said Jack, coolly. "Just you do as I want you, and then we shall be right enough. Will you trust to me?"

"Yes, yes—oh! yes. You have saved me once."

"I have, and will a thousand times, if it be necessary. But come, this is the way."

Again taking the hand of the shroud-maker in his, Jack ran with her down Drury-lane as far as the "Black Lion."

He paused for a moment on the threshold of the inn, and looked behind him.

His pursuers were neither in sight nor hearing.

"Hurrah!" he said, "we have done them. I told you we should, my dear. They have evidently either turned up the wrong part of Drury-lane, or else down Long-acre. Come in here along with me. You will be welcome, and what is more, quite safe."

"I will trust myself into your hands," said the girl, solemnly, "and God forgive me if I act wrong."

"And," said Jack, "may God forget me if I do not shield you from all harm!"

CHAPTER XVII.

APPEARS TO POINT TO THE FACT THAT BLUESKIN IS NOT EXACTLY WHAT HE SEEMS—A MYSTERY.

UPROARIOUS shouts and other signs of boisterous merriment issued as usual from the old public-house, and when a louder chorus of bacchanic laughter rose, the girl Jack had taken under his guardianship again clung half-terrified to his arm.

She was, in fact, in a high state of nervous excitement, which such events and startling incidents as had happened to her within the last half-hour could scarcely fail to produce in a delicate and sensitive organization.

But, again assuring her that she was in a place of perfect safety, and had nothing whatever to fear, Jack drew her along the passage, and into the bar.

"Johnson! Johnson!" he cried, in a loud voice, upon finding the place was empty, "Johnson, my boy! This way, I want you."

With wonder very visibly portrayed upon his countenance, the landlord appeared in answer to the summons.

The girl had sunk half-fainting on a seat.

"Fetch the missus," cried Sheppard, "and ask her to look after this poor thing. I ask it of you in the name of Joseph Blake!"

"What's that you are asking in my name?" said a voice at this juncture, and which Jack immediately recognised as that of Blueskin. "What is it, eh?"

As he asked this question, Joe Blake, who had heard Jack utter his name while he stood in the passage, pushed open the half-door that led into the bar, and entered.

He gave vent to a whistle as soon as he saw the girl.

"Hullo, Jack. This won't do, you know. Up to your tricks already. Well, I shouldn't have thought it. Who is she? What does she want?"

But Jack replied in a serious voice—

"Don't ask me any questions just now, but render me the favour I desire. It is simply that Johnson's wife should attend to this poor young thing, who is half fainting with fright. I will tell you all that has happened as soon as I get a chance."

"Oh! all right. Here is Mrs. Johnson herself, and she will see to her, I know. Won't you, now?"

"To be sure I will, seeing it's a friend of yours, Mr. Blake. Here, my dear," she added, addressing the girl, "rouse yourself; you will soon be better."

"Treat her with the greatest care, Mrs. Johnson," said Jack. "I am going now. You will have your reward for succouring her one day; for she is a real lady."

A smile appeared on the face of the landlady as Jack made this assertion, which was by no means borne out by the girl's attire.

It was tasteful and neat, but very, very poor.

But Jack made his exit as soon as he had spoken: and as Mrs. Johnson had a kind heart, she felt much affected

as she looked upon the pale, suffering, and beautiful face, and at once set about recovering her.

Blueskin had accompanied Jack from the bar, and the pair made their way into the kitchen, when they sat down.

The place was tolerably full of people.

To all of them Blueskin appeared to be well known and a favourite, for a universal shout of welcome came from the lips of all present.

But as soon as they could, both avoided the notice of the company.

"It wants half an hour of the time when I propose we shall start," said Blueskin, looking up at the dingy face of a Dutch clock which hung opposite to the fire-place.

"You are before your time."

"I am, but I thought I might as well come on here, and better. But now tell me the meaning of your bringing that girl here? What happened after you left me?"

In reply to this question Jack went into a very elaborate statement of how he had entered the public-house in Middle-row, Holborn, and what had ensued thereupon.

To the whole of the extraordinary narrative did Blueskin listen with the most wrapt attention. Not a word escaped him, and he fairly puzzled Jack with the number of seemingly aimless questions which he asked him.

On the whole, Jack was enabled to give pretty satisfactory replies.

Most particularly did Blueskin ask if he—Jack—was sure there was nothing about the individual who had been named as his lordship that would afford a clue to his identification.

Jack replied in the negative, but produced the watch which he had taken.

Blueskin was much surprised at its magnificence.

"Why this is worth a little fortune," he said; "now I think we shall be able to find out what we want to know."

"How so?" said Jack, looking also at the watch; "I can see nothing on the seals."

"That's nothing to do with it."

"How, then, will you find out?"

"By taking the watch in the morning to Jonathan. He will come down pretty handsomely for it, I dare say."

"But I don't see how that will tell us. Surely Jonathan cannot tell the owner of every watch that is brought to him?"

"Well, not exactly; but it will be done in this way. You may, I think, rest pretty well assured that his lordship won't be willing to lose his watch without making an effort to regain it, and the chances are that he will apply to Wild."

"I see now, of course."

"Jonathan having the watch in his possession, will be able to treat for its restoration in his usual fashion; and so you see when 'his lordship' comes to Little Newgate, we shall be able to learn who he is."

"So we shall."

"I am determined to use every effort to find out who this girl actually is, and if possible restore her to her proper position. I have already something more than a suspicion of her name and title."

"It was now Jack's turn to be interested."

"The deuce you have! Tell me, tell me at once!"

"No."

"No?"

"Ask me for no reasons," said Blueskin, rising, and apparently in some agitation. "I cannot give them. Besides, it is time we started."

So saying, he left the kitchen, leaving Jack to follow his example, while the reader may rest assured he was by no means slow in doing.

The sudden alteration in the behaviour of his friend was mysterious in the extreme.

"There's something more I have got to find out," said Jack to himself, "and I'll do it, too!"

"Now, Jack," he heard Blueskin, "are you coming?"

"In a minute," was the reply, and Sheppard ran hastily to the bar.

He was in hopes of seeing either Mrs. Johnson or his protegee there, but in this he was disappointed.

Nor was there even the landlord himself of whom he could make an inquiry.

Fain would he before starting upon his expedition with

Blueskin, the dangers of which, of course, he could not estimate; fain would he, we say, have seen again for a brief moment the young girl he had rescued, and received an assurance that all was well.

But he could not gratify this desire.

Blueskin was at the door of the inn waiting for him, and Jack feared to anger his new friend by delaying to come at his command.

He was fearful, too, that he would consider he was hanging back from his word, and that was a thing Jack could not bear to have ascribed to him for anything.

Therefore, he sacrificed his inclination and went to the front door.

It must be understood that, although the street door of the "Black Lion" was always left open, yet there was a half-glazed inner door, the panes in which were protected by a net-work of wire, which swung shut after everyone who came either in or out.

Just as he pulled open this door, Blueskin again called to him.

He was standing on the step, and near him was the landlord.

"What a time you have been," he said, "I thought you did not mean coming."

"I didn't choose to come before," replied Jack, sullenly; "and what business had you to think any such thing? If I had not given my word no power on earth should make me go with you, but as I have promised I will perform."

"Bravo, Jack!" said Blueskin, who was pleased at this manifestation of independency. "Say no more. I was in a hurry, that was all."

This apology was sufficient for Jack.

"Come along," continued Blueskin; and then, turning towards the landlord, he added—

"Bear in mind what I have said, Johnson. Treat her with every respect. I have my own particular motives for it."

"You shall be obeyed, captain," replied Johnson, "rest assured of it. Good night to you! You will find everything for you at Gregg's."

"All right, Johnson! Good night. I shall be back by four."

"Very good, I shall expect you."

"And now, Jack," said Blueskin, "just step out."

"Have we far to go?"

"Only to Gregg's."

"Where's that?"

"In Long-acre. We shall get a horse and cart there, and then drive to Kilburn."

"But tell me what it is you know or suspect about the girl," said Jack. "You cannot imagine my anxiety to learn something further. What was the reason you acted as you did when we were in the tap-room?"

Blueskin made no reply.

Jack repeated his question.

"I have said do not ask me for any reasons."

"I know you did, but surely there can be no harm in your telling me what you know?"

"I say again I cannot do it," said Blueskin, almost fiercely. "If it is as I have good reason to suspect, she is to some extent mixed up with my own fate—my own life, and that I never relate to a soul."

"Your life?" repeated Jack, perfectly amazed.

"Yes, mine!"

Jack Sheppard felt the curiosity he felt already, increased a thousand times.

"For heaven's sake," he said, "now you have said so much say more, for I am sure I could not bear the suspense. Tell me—tell me at once."

But Blueskin relapsed into a moody silence, nor could Jack by any means extort another word from him.

He was aroused, however, from the conflict of his thoughts by Blake coming suddenly to a halt.

It was at the corner of King-street, Long-acre.

Jack looked up and saw it was a livery stable.

Blueskin simply made a sign for Jack to follow him, and then passed under a gateway into a spacious yard, on every side surrounded by numerous buildings.

Then Jack heard Blueskin blow a whistle, which had a peculiar sound.

It was instantly responded to by a rattling of wheels over the stones with which the yard was paved.

But Jack's thoughts were too much occupied to take more than a cursory notice of what was going on; he kept asking himself—Who was the young girl he had saved, and it what way was she connected with Blueskin?

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOLLOWS JONATHAN WILD UPON ONE OF HIS NIGHT EXCURSIONS, AND RELATES THE DARING DEEDS WHICH HE COMMITTED.

"A LIKELY young fellow that!" muttered Jonathan Wild, after he had so cavalierly dismissed Jack Sheppard and Blueskin from his presence. "A very likely young fellow, indeed! I shall be able to make something of him in time, I daresay, so I shall begin with giving him plenty of encouragement! That's the way to do it!"

Having come to this conclusion, Jonathan took a few whiffs at his pipe, and then pouring out a tumbler full of brandy, he drank considerably more than half of it at a draught.

The spirit was strong, and it forced the moisture into Wild's eyes, and for a second or two fairly took away his breath.

"That's better!" he gasped. "I ought to take something extra before I do what I intend to do to-night. It would not do to trust it into any other hands than my own. Just let me see that I have got the particulars all right!"

Hereupon, Jonathan picked up that day's newspaper, and, in a low voice, read with great deliberation the following extraordinary paragraph, as though he wished to impress every word of it upon his mind.

The paragraph ran thus—

UNPARALLELED OCCURRENCE.—We are indebted to a correspondent for the following particulars of an event we believe to be without a parallel. It appears that Friday last, the 7th instant, was fixed for the celebration of the nuptials of H—n—y J—ff—s Esq., of E—n—hall, Tottenham, and J—e M—k—l, only daughter of G—e M—k—l, Esq., of the L—e, Theobald's-park. The union was brought about by love only, and a long and happy life was looked to as being the fortunate lot of the youthful pair. But, alas! as if to prove the folly of trusting to the stability of earthly things, an event occurred which has thrown the whole country-side into the deepest gloom. That event was death! While the bridegroom was in the act of putting the ring on the finger of the bride, in accordance with the terms of the marriage ceremony, he felt the hand of the bride become deathly cold, and ere he could scarce note this circumstance, she fell back upon the marble flooring of the church. The utmost consternation of course prevailed, and every means tried to restore the bride to life, but in vain. The vital spark had fled for ever. The effects of this scene upon the bridegroom and the other relatives of the bride can be better imagined than described. But the strangest part of the affair remains yet to be told. It has transpired that for the three nights immediately preceding the wedding, the bride-apparent dreamed that while the ceremony was being performed she fell down dead. That she should dream of the wedding for three nights running was in itself not very remarkable, but that she should dream the same dream, and that of so strange a kind, was exceedingly so. On the second occasion, while relating her vision, she declared herself firmly of belief that it was prophetic, and that it would happen just as she had dreamed. The third occasion, which was on the night preceding the day of the wedding, she expressed herself still more confirmed in this belief, and requested as a favour, which she asked as a person about to die, that they would inter her in her nuptial garments, not removing a single article from her person. Every endeavour was made to dissipate this gloomy foreboding, but without result, and her agitation at the refusal of her request rose to such a height that the worst consequences were dreaded, and at last, to calm her, they made the promise which she required. We have stated already the catastrophe. It turned out that her dream was fulfilled to the very letter. Of course nothing else is talked of for miles around. The funeral of the unhappy bride is fixed to take place to-day (Monday), and it is expected that a large number of people will assemble to witness the obsequies. We understand from the best authority that at the urgent desire of the bridegroom, who is almost crazed under his sudden bereavement, the bride will have her express wishes fulfilled; that is to say, will be placed in the coffin in her wedding-dress. A tiara of diamonds, which is estimated at being worth two thousand five hundred pounds, and which had been presented to her by her father, will be buried with her, she having obtained a solemn promise that not one article which she wore should be removed. Altogether the affair is quite unprecedented, and caused the greatest possible excitement. We shall publish in our next impression a full account of the funeral.

Such was the paragraph which Jonathan Wild so carefully perused.

As he finished reading it, he let the paper fall to the floor.

He smoked on abstractedly for a few moments, being deeply immersed in his reflections.

Presently his cogitations took consistence and form.

He uttered three words.

"Two thousand pounds!"

Those were the words.

It was then pretty evident about what Jonathan was considering.

He had more than half made up his mind to go to Tottenham.

The reader can guess his object.

It was to rob the dead!

The diamond tiara Jonathan considered it would be a world of pities to allow to remain upon the brow of a dead person, to whom it could not by any possibility be of service. He calculated the difficulties there might be to overcome.

But, as none of them appeared to be insurmountable, he determined to make the attempt.

To despoil the dead!

It was what nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand would have shrunk from doing.

They would have been overcome by the horror of the idea.

But Jonathan was unquestionably one in a thousand.

Upon his inbrutalized perceptions the corpse of a human being made no more impression than would any other mass of inert matter. Like Lady Macbeth, he would have said—

The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures.

He rose to his feet, and put on his hat and wig.

"Yes," he muttered, buckling on his banger, "I will do it. The diamond tiara shall be mine. What will there be to fear? Nothing, absolutely nothing. While alive, what chance could a delicate girl have with me? None. Then how much less when dead! That's the way to look at it. I'll have one more nip of brandy, and then start."

It was in this way Jonathan endeavoured to buoy up his heart; but, in spite of his philosophy, his hand trembled fearfully as he poured the spirituous liquor from the bottle into the glass.

"It won't do for me to start while I am nervous like this. I shall sit down again, and drink a little more. I can see I have not had enough."

And yet he had drank enough to reduce any ordinary man to a state of utter helplessness.

"Let me see," he said. "There is Lord Ingestrie's reward for the necklace; I must manage somehow to make that up to four thousand pounds. Then this tiara added to it will make six thousand pounds! A glorious sum, and worth something to obtain. No matter how disagreeable, I will have it!"

Avarice was the mainspring of Jonathan's existence.

As he contemplated the amount of his prospective gains his nervousness disappeared.

But it required some little resolution to screw up his courage to undertake the job.

Again he rose.

This time he walked straight to the door of his apartment, and, passing through it, descended the stairs, and reached the hall.

A faint groan came to his ears.

It was poor Tonks uttered it.

He was still "on the lock," as they called it.

Jonathan strode forward.

"Now then!" he said, "what the deuce are you groaning in that way for? Hold your row, will you?"

Tonks, at the sound of the thief-taker's voice, stifled the groan that was upon his lips, and made a hideous face instead, for he saw that Jonathan had the eudgel in his grasp.

"I say hold your row!" cried Wild. "Why don't you reply?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Where's Quilt Arnold?"

"In the garrison, Mr. Wild."

"The garrison" was that portion of Jonathan's house which was specially reserved for the accommodation of his band.

"Go to him, then, and tell him to bring my horse round to the front door; I am going out."

"I will, Mr. Wild," said Tonks, getting up with a painful effort upon his legs, and hobbling down the hall.

"And look here! tell him to saddle a horse for himself at the same time; I shall want him to go with me."

"Very good, sir."

Tonks disappeared.

Glad was he to do so with a whole skin.

Jonathan Wild stuck one end of his bludgeon into his pocket, and put his hands in also.

With his head bent a little forward he walked slowly up and down the hall.

He was arranging the order of his proceedings.

In an incredibly short time, considering what had to be done, Quilt Arnold—who, like Blueskin, being high in Jonathan's confidence, was provided with a key, which enabled him to open the front door at pleasure—Quilt Arnold, we say, in a very few minutes after the reception of the order entered, and told the great thief-taker that the horses were waiting at the door.

Quilt Arnold, who, as is well known, was one of the most daring members of Jonathan Wild's gang, was of medium height, and very strongly built. In his countenance there was nothing prepossessing, unless, perhaps, his eyes, which were jet black, small, and piercing. Indeed, it was few who could keep their countenances unmoved when Quilt fixed his keen glance upon them.

To those who were immediately under him he was overbearing and tyrannical to a degree.

To Jonathan most morigerous.

But this is by no means a rarity.

He spoke in a cringing tone of voice.

"The horses are all ready, if you please, Mr. Wild," he said, "and waiting at the door."

"Very well, Quilt," growled Jonathan, throwing off his abstraction and advancing to the door. "Follow me. Keep a few yards in the rear, and take notice if you hear any one on the road besides ourselves. I am going out of town a little way."

"Yes, Mr. Wild, I am quite ready, sir, if you please."

As he spoke, he shut the door after him, and hurried down the steps into the street.

CHAPTER XIX.

WILD HAS A HORRIBLE ADVENTURE IN THE VAULTS OF TOTTENHAM CHURCH.

THE night was cold and dark.

Dense, sad coloured clouds obscured the sky.

The wind came in short and fitful gusts, and whistled dismally as it swept round the narrow corners.

Occasionally, too, a heavy send of rain would reach the earth.

Newgate-street was deserted.

At that time few people ventured forth after dark, in consequence of the risk they ran of being set upon by thieves.

But on this night certainly no one would leave the shelter of a roof, unless compelled by some pressing necessity to do so.

Quilt Arnold felt anything but pleased at the prospect of a long ride into the open country.

But it was more than his head was worth to demur, so he wisely held his peace.

Jonathan Wild mounted his steed.

It was a tall, sinewy creature, not by any means handsome, but of that kind usually chosen for cavalry service—fleet, powerful, and enduring.

Quilt Arnold mounted also.

With great precision, then, Jonathan shaped his course for his destination.

No one was much better acquainted with the topography of London and its environs than he was.

As they approached the open country the cold rapidly increased, and the wind was enough to cut one to the bone.

Still Jonathan, unheeding, pushed on, while Quilt, shivering in every limb, kept, as he had been bid, a few paces behind him.

At length, to the inexpressible joy of the latter, the village of Tottenham was reached.

It was by no means late, at least between ten and eleven o'clock, and yet every one in the village appeared to have retired for the night.

With the exception of one place.

That was the village inn.

From the windows of this streamed a bright light,

Jonathan drew up at the door and called to Quilt Arnold to approach him.

"I am going in here for a few moments," he said. "Walk the horses up and down and keep a sharp look-out upon every person that passes you. I will send you out something to drink."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan entered the inn.

He correctly calculated that in the kitchen of the inn he would find the principal people in the village assembled, and as it was only natural to suppose the Bridal of Death, as it might be termed, would be the subject of the conversation.

Jonathan wanted some particulars respecting the funeral.

He entered the kitchen then, and, as he expected, found it full of people, all busily engaged in talking.

He sat down upon a seat near the door without exciting more than casual notice.

As he passed the bar he had called for a glass of brandy-and-water for himself and another for his man.

Then, having been supplied, he prepared to listen to what was going forward.

A little weazen-faced man, with a disagreeable squeaking voice, was speaking.

"You can say what you like," he cried, evidently in reply to some observation that had just been made. "You can say what you like; but still, for all that, I shall stick to my own opinion!"

"And what is that?"

"What is it? Why that before many days are over some of the London thieves will be down here, and off the diamond head-dress will go!"

This proposition was received with murmurs of disbelief. "Ah, well! time will show who's right and who's wrong. There hasn't been time for it to get known among them yet; but when they do hear of it, you'll see."

"But it would be sacrilege to break into a church; besides, it would require some one with very strong nerves to descend into the vault at night, and in the dark, for it would not do for them to show a light."

"Yes, I know that fast enough; but such a thing as that would be a powerful temptation, and there are men in London who would dare and do anything for money."

"I don't say there ain't, but this I do say, and that is if one of these London gentry as you've been speaking about was to come down with the intention of taking the diamond head-dress, they would find it a harder job than they anticipated."

Wild began to prick up his ears.

Some information would now doubtless be given that would be of the most material assistance to him.

"Fools!" he muttered; "but it is as well there are so many in the world, or how is a clever fellow to get a living?"

"Yes," said the thin man, with the squeaking voice, "I knew there would be considerable difficulty in the way."

"There would—more than they would be able to get over."

"Pho! pho!"

"First, then, there's the church-door. It's only last Whitsuntide that friend Robins here put a new lock on it."

"That's right enough," said a person whom Jonathan supposed to be Robins; "and a good lock it is, too. I made it myself, after a design of my own, and I give any one leave to try and pick it."

Wild smiled grimly.

"Very well, but supposing they do pick the door?"

"No, no," interrupted Mr. Robins, vehemently, "they can't pick it, I tell you."

"But, just for the sake of argument, we'll say they do pick it."

"But what's the good of supposing what can't come to pass? An argument must have something to stand on."

"Well, well," replied the other, "we'll suppose they do get inside the church. They might get through the window, you know."

"Oh! very good," said Robins, "I don't say nothing about the windows; I say they can't pick the lock, so what would be the good of supposing it?"

"Hear, hear! of course!" murmured the company.

"I say we'll suppose they get inside the church. Why,

their difficulties have only just began. You all know where the vault is—just in front of the altar?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, the stone that covers it, you know very well, is a flat slab of marble, and weighs I don't know how many hundredweight."

"Five or six," said a voice.

"Then wasn't it mortared down this very afternoon, and now I should like to know how they are to get it up, eh? without any one in the village being aware of it?"

"My friend," said the weazen-faced man again. "In the course of my life I've been to a great many places and seen a great many things, and I can tell you that I have known thieves do more wonderful and seemingly impossible things than that would be."

"They must have an uncommon pluck to try such a thing on, and no mistake," said another voice. "It isn't a diamond wreath that would tempt me to do such a thing, bad as I want money."

"Now then, are you going to stop setting here all night, I should like to know?" said a woman, whose appearance may be briefly summed up in the words, "fat, fair, and forty." "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Mr. D., to sit here setting such an example; keeping men away from their wives; but it's just like you, you wretch. Look at the clock; it's nearly half-past eleven!"

The rapidity and shrillness with which these words were uttered produced an electrical effect upon the company.

Even Jonathan was so disconcerted that he took a huge gulp of his brandy and water.

"But my dear," began an apologetic voice, "you forget."

"What do you mean, Mr. D.?" said the landlady, with additional irateness; "how can I forget? Can you look the clock in the face without feeling downright ashamed of yourself?"

Mr. D. made no reply, from which it may be inferred that he would feel ashamed of himself, nor would it need a conjurer to divine he was a subject to gynarchy.

But the guests seemed perfectly to understand what was meant.

One and all finished what ever there was before them, and the knocking out of pipes was something terrific.

They were all in a hurry to depart.

A strict woman was Mrs. Dyer, the landlady, and lord too, of the "Tiger's Head." Every night was the front door closed, and the company turned out punctually at eleven o'clock, but on this occasion she allowed them an extra half hour.

But, despite her acerbity, a capital business was done at the "Tiger's Head." Mrs. Dyer was a special favourite with every one of the customers, for she was one of those monstrosities of feminine nature known as a "fine woman."

But in this case the word "fine" has always been a meaning very different to what Dr. Johnson set down for it in his dictionary.

He defines it "pure; thin; not coarse."

Now, neither of these definitions can apply to a fine woman, with the exception of the last; but, in this case, the negative must be removed.

Then you have it exactly.

However, Jonathan Wild, seeing this state of things, deemed it expedient not to attract attention towards himself by remaining until the room was clear, so was nearly the first to leave it.

Quilt Arnold was walking the horses up and down, according to orders.

Jonathan mounted immediately, and set off at a gallop. It would be necessary for him to defer the commencement of his attack until the whole of the inhabitants were deep in their first sleep.

His brief sojourn at the "Tiger's Head" had in its results surpassed his utmost expectations.

He had acquired there the very information necessary to the successful execution of his plan.

Quilt Arnold was far from pleased.

But the night was by no means so inclement as it had been. The wind had considerably abated—the sky had become clear of clouds, and so the uncomfortable dashes of rain came no longer.

During this ride Jonathan arranged in his mind his exact plan of operations.

What that was will be quickly seen.

Having allowed, as he considered, a sufficient time to elapse, he turned his horse's head in the direction of Tottenham Church.

All these movements were quite incomprehensible to Quilt.

"What in the world is he after?" he muttered, as he once more placed himself in the rear of the thief-taker.

CHAPTER XX.

A SCENE OF HORROR—JONATHAN WILD BELIEVES HIS LAST HOUR HAS COME.

ABOUT two hundred yards from old Tottenham Church Jonathan Wild pulled up and dismounted.

It was before a gate leading into a meadow that he had stopped.

"Undo this gate, Quilt," he cried, "and turn the horses into it. Then follow me on foot."

As it happened, the gate was not locked, but merely fastened with a spring latch. Arnold had no difficulty in doing as he had been bid, and he ran along the lane after Wild, who had almost got out of sight.

At the small wooden gate leading into the churchyard, Wild paused and looked carefully all about him, as well as listened with all his ears.

But all was still.

He made a rapid gesture to his follower to be silent and follow him.

Dreading lest, in the perfect stillness which prevailed, that if he trod upon the gravelled path the sound of his footsteps might be heard, he walked upon the turf.

Twenty steps brought him to the door of the church.

Before it was a fantastic-looking porch completely overgrown with parasitical plants.

Once under this place Jonathan felt himself pretty secure from observation.

He lighted a dark lantern which he took from his pocket.

He, however, only partially withdrew the slide before the lens.

His object was to make an examination of the lock.

From what the maker of it had said, Wild fully expected to find some very complicated piece of mechanism.

But to his astonishment the keyhole of the lock was large enough for him to put his little finger in.

A grin of derision came to his lips.

The locksmith was but a novice of the art now brought to such perfection. He had fallen into the prevalent error that to be impregnable a lock should be large.

But now they are made upon quite an opposite principle.

From a pocket in his vest Jonathan produced a queer-looking little instrument.

Bidding Quilt hold the light, he inserted it into the keyhole.

He worked it about for some time unsuccessfully. The lock resisted him.

But Jonathan persevered, and the result was that at last the bolt of the lock shot back with a snap.

In spite of themselves both started.

In the silent church it sounded almost as loud as the report of a pistol.

The door creaked open.

After waiting to assure himself that no alarm had been given so far, Wild entered.

He took the lantern into his own hands again.

"Close the door, Quilt," he whispered, "and stay at it on guard. I am going to the other end of the church. If you hear anyone coming, give me the alarm at once."

Having made this arrangement, which was certainly an admirable one, Jonathan, allowing the faintest possible gleam of light to fall upon the ground before him, advanced with the greatest confidence as to his destination along the nave of the church.

It had been mentioned in the conversation that the vault wherein reposed the young bride so inopportunistically stricken down by the hand of death was immediately opposite the altar.

On reaching this spot Wild looked about him for the indications of one of the slabs having been recently removed.

This he was not long in discovering.

He stooped down and pressed with his thumb nail upon the cement between two of the stones.

It was quite soft.

But now a great difficulty arose. The slab was large and consequently heavy, while he was unpossessed of any tools that would properly assist him to elevate it.

However, slight as the prospect of lifting the stone from its setting seemed, Jonathan put the lamp down on the floor, and with a large clasp-knife commenced picking out the mortar.

In a very short time he had completed this part of his task. The whole of the cement was removed.

His coat pocket now provided him with an implement which he never went anywhere without taking with him.

This was a small crowbar.

With the same air of quiet deliberation as he had all along exhibited, Wild inserted its point into the space where the mortar had been, and began to prize the stone.

He worked gently and steadily.

Gradually the heavy piece of stone was raised, and it was soon high enough for him to insert the thin end of his bludgeon as a kind of wedge.

After this the work became easier.

But, nevertheless, he would have been glad enough of Quilt Arnold's assistance, only he considered it to be essential to his safety to have Quilt there on the watch for the approach of any one.

That individual felt the greatest interest in what Wild was about. His visit to the "Tiger's Head," and afterwards apparently aimless ride into the country and back to Tottenham, roused Quilt's curiosity to such an extent that it became almost unbearable.

He strained his eyes, and endeavoured to pierce the thick obscurity in the old church.

He could just see a shadow occasionally, which he identified as his master's body.

The sound of prizing the stone, however, came to his ears with perfect distinctness.

"What is he after?" he muttered. "I'd give a trifle to know; but, of course, it's more than my head's worth to move from here and try to find out. Hang it all, who is he afraid will come I wonder to the church at this time of night? Hallo! what's up now?"

A fall, and then a bitter execration.

Those were the two sounds that Quilt heard in quick succession, and which interrupted the chain of his meditations.

Both are easily explained.

The bludgeon which Jonathan had so cunningly put underneath the stone had slipped from its position, and the slab fell back again into its setting.

All Wild's labour was lost.

No wonder he vented the curse he did. It was certainly aggravating in the extreme.

But, undeterred by this mishap, he recommenced his work with fresh vigour.

He called Quilt to his aid.

Never before was Jonathan so willingly obeyed.

Their joint exertions of course effected a great deal, and at last both, by pushing with all their might, succeeded in getting the slab on to the flooring of the church.

But they did not remove it altogether; an aperture just large enough for the thief-taker's body to pass through was left, but that was all.

Jonathan Wild took the lantern in his hand and prepared to descend.

"Now, Quilt," he said, "back again to the door."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"I am going down here, you understand. What to do doesn't in any way concern you, so don't trouble your head about it; but just keep inside the door, and the moment you hear a sound indicative of the approach of any one give me the alarm instantly."

"Very well, Mr. Wild."

"I shall trust to you, recollect. If anything occurs, the best thing you can do to make me aware of it will be to blow your whistle."

"Yes, sir."

"Not loudly, you understand. A long, low note. I shall hear that."

Quilt resumed his station at the door.

Jonathan Wild slowly lowered himself into the vault.

He felt steps under his feet.

They were covered with some soft substance, into which his boots sank deeply. A minute's thought told him what it was.

Sawdust.

That was it. The stairs were thickly covered with it. Then Jonathan got fairly beneath the flooring of the church.

To say that a clammy sensation of fear did not seize him would be untrue.

Jonathan Wild was human, and susceptible of human influences.

The silence awed him.

The dampness chilled his blood. He could feel it cold even about his heart.

The intense darkness seemed like some mass of black velvety material, which was pressing upon him in every direction.

But, mastering these sensations with a tremendous effort, and summoning up all his fortitude and courage, Wild drew back the slide of the lantern lens to its fullest extent, and allowed the whole of the light to pass freely through the lens.

It revealed with great distinctness the dark, black walls, which presented a vivid contrast to the white sawdust, with which the steps were plentifully covered.

Slowly, step by step, Wild descended the rude steps leading into the vaults.

At their termination was a strong iron door.

Upon perceiving this unexpected obstacle, Wild felt half inclined to turn back, making that serve for an excuse.

The fact is, he was terrified, and was becoming more so every minute.

But still in his terror one thought was uppermost in his mind.

And that was, should he so far be the slave of his own apprehensions as to leave his object unachieved, he would, when he reflected upon the circumstance by the light of day, be mortified beyond measure at his own pusillanimity.

And so he would not turn back.

And yet he felt an equal disinclination to proceed further.

He could not avoid feeling conscious that a strange, heavy sensation was pressing upon his brain.

He put out his hand to steady himself.

By an accident it was against the door of the vault that he leant instead of the wall.

Slowly, and with a dismal sound, it gave way before the pressure.

Finding that the door was unsecured seemed to have a re-invigorating effect upon Wild, and he shook off to a very great extent the "thick coming fancies" which oppressed him.

He made a step forward into the vault.

As he did so he fancied he heard a sound coming apparently from a great distance.

It was like a muffled groan or shriek.

"Pho, pho!" said Wild, and he waived his bludgeon about him in a defiant manner as he spoke. "Pho, pho! I will be fooled by my fancy no longer, or else I shall end by going mad."

He rapidly flashed the light of the lantern about him, and thus obtained a transient glimpse of every part of the place he was in.

The vault was spacious.

But there was no one in it save himself and dead.

The atmosphere, however, appeared to have a sickly, clammy feel, and which as he inspired it seemed to communicate itself to his whole frame.

Then Wild found that by speaking he lessened the gloomy horror of the place.

His voice, he thought, never sounded so pleasantly before.

"I wonder now," he said, as he opened the door of the lantern, and so allowed the light to diffuse itself equally all round, "I wonder, now, whereabouts the coffin is that contains the tiara of diamonds? It will be well earned when I get it."

This was true.

That he should be in doubt and perplexed to know which was the coffin he wanted was natural enough, for all round the vault were niches, in which, upon shelves, the coffins were ranged one above the other.

Wild did not see room for above three more, without some fresh place was provided for them.

But on looking more attentively he perceived that some

of the coffins, which were all uniformly painted black and cased with lead, bore every appearance of extreme age.

Then the thought struck him that most likely they had been placed there in, so to speak, chronological order.

If this should be, much trouble would be saved.

And sure enough such proved to be the case.

In brief, he found at last one niche in which the coffins were quite new, or rather appeared to be, for Jonathan could detect no difference between them.

The two top shelves were unoccupied.

If, then, his theory was correct, the topmost one must be the one he sought.

He turned round to seek some object upon which to stand, for he found he was not high enough to reach this one.

As he did so, he heard, with the utmost plainness, a dull, rustling, bumping noise.

He turned round with the rapidity of lightning.

His eyes fixed themselves upon the coffin, which he made up his mind contained the object of his desires.

Was he dreaming?

Did his eyesight play him false?

No; he felt neither of these was the case, and yet he saw that which would be by everyone deemed an impossibility.

The coffin moved.

Not once, but twice, thrice, while the thumping, struggling sound increased.

Wild tried to move.

But it was as though he was possessed by some frightful incubus, which held all his corporal faculties enthralled.

He could not move.

He could not speak.

His jaw fell in the effort, but he could not raise it, while his eyes seem starting from his head.

His attitude and his countenance were expressive of the most intense, unutterable horror.

And then arose a shriek so wild, so unearthly, so brain-piercing in its tones, that it was sufficient to drive anyone who heard it into madness.

And to enhance the frightful nature of the scene, ere yet the awful scream was fully articulated, the coffin turned over on its side, and fell with a terrific crash on the floor at the thief-taker's feet.

He felt his senses were leaving him.

The lantern dropped from his nerveless fingers.

At the same moment he felt himself clutched with vice-like power by the arm.

That seemed to break the spell, and his pent-up feelings gave vent in one heart-bursting groan.

Jonathan Wild sunk down on the floor of the vault in a swoon!

CHAPTER XXI.

RETURNS TO BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD, AND RELATES HOW THEY EFFECTED AN ENTRANCE INTO "THE GRANGE."

"Now, JACK! Up with you! It will be better to ride than to walk, I can tell you. Jump up!"

Such were the words addressed by Blueskin to Jack Sheppard, when, in answer to the signal given by the former, a horse and cart appeared in the yard belonging to the livery stables in Long-acre.

Jack obeyed.

Blueskin was by his side in a moment, and then, taking hold of the reins, he touched the horse with the whip and drove out into the street.

The horse was one that possessed every essential requisite for such a job as he was now upon, and without any coercion he drew the light vehicle along at a rapid pace.

The Oxford-road was the point to which Blueskin shaped his course.

As yet Jack knew nothing of their destination, and so he took this opportunity to inquire.

"Kilburn," said Blake.

"And what sort of a place is it?"

"A very pretty old-fashioned building, known simply as 'The Grange.' Keep your eyes open, and then you will be able to manage a little job of the kind yourself."

"But Blueskin, my friend, do as a favour tell me all you know about the young girl at the 'Black Lion.' If you had any idea how anxious and interested I am about her you would do so at once."

As before, however, his companion made no reply to his question.

This behaviour puzzled Jack exceedingly, who began, like the landlord, to entertain an opinion that Joe Blake as he called himself, was something more than he professed to be.

And in that conjecture they were perfectly right.

In the progress, however, of this narrative the mystery in which he inshrouded himself will be dispelled, and the reader put into possession of one of the most extraordinary life romances that could be imagined.

It will not fail to be suspected that there was in some way a connexion between the shroud-maker and Jonathan's lieutenant, and we may as well state here that such was actually the case.

But of the nature of the connexion we can at present say nothing.

Jack's disposition was one that might truly be called an impressionable one, and the peculiar circumstances attendant upon the rescue of the girl had not failed to exert a deep and lasting influence.

His mind was occupied with and about her exclusively.

It tormented him to a degree that his comrade should actually have some knowledge respecting who and what she was, and yet refuse to impart it to him.

The cart sped on its way.

A few minutes after they had passed the church of St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, they heard the hour of midnight pealed forth.

Another turn to the left and they were in the Oxford-road.

This was completely deserted; neither horse nor man appeared in view.

As, however, at the period of our story this place was open country, the wind swept along it with great keenness.

It was rather strange that on that night Jonathan Wild and Quilt Arnold—Blueskin and Jack Sheppard should both be out on that particular night and bound on perilous expeditions.

There was not a word further uttered by either Sheppard or Blueskin until the railings which surround Hyde-park were reached.

Then the latter spoke.

"Don't be sulky, Jack," he said. "If it was in my power to communicate to you what I know I would do so freely, but I cannot."

"Why not? In what way is it a secret?"

"Thus. I could not answer you without giving you a glimpse of my own life—I mean without enabling you to form an idea who I really am—and that would be impossible."

Jack was silent.

"I will, however, promise you to do all I can to serve the girl, but you must not expect to know all my thoughts. The time will come, perhaps—perhaps not."

He turned into the Uxbridge-road along which they went at unabated speed.

"And now, Jack, listen to me. Dismiss from your mind all thoughts except those immediately connected with the business we are upon. Less than a quarter-of-an-hour now will take us to 'The Grange.'"

"It's no good asking me not to think about her," replied Jack. "It would be impossible."

"Oh! stuff! be a little bit more like a man, or I shall be ashamed of you."

The remainder of the distance to Kilburn was passed over in silence.

And now the moon rose above the huge masses of clouds upon the horizon, and shed a subdued light upon the scene.

Picturesquely situated upon a piece of gently rising ground, was a quaint, red-brick building.

When they were within twenty yards of it, Blueskin pulled up, and pointing with his whip, said—

"Yonder is the place. We must get out here, for if we go further, the grating of the wheels may be heard. It is a neat-looking place."

"Who lives in it?" said Jack.

"A retired city merchant, named Hadley. He is immensely rich, so we ought to make a good haul! It is not, however, for booty in the shape of plate or money that I go, but for some papers also."

While speaking, Blueskin and Sheppard alighted from the cart, and led the horse to the side of the lane, where, as is not infrequently the case, grass was growing in abundance.

The horse immediately bent his head, and began cropping the sweet herbage.

Shut up in a London stable as he was nearly all the year round, and fed upon nothing but dry food, a meal of grass was quite a luxury.

"It won't be worth while to tie him in any way," said Blake. "I know him. He will stray only a few yards from where he now is. Just get up on to the step of the cart and give me the bag of tools I left upon the seat."

"Here you are! Why, what a weight they are!"

"Yes, rather. Come along now, at once. We are already later than I intended to be; however, perhaps it is quite as well."

"Why?"

"It will have given everybody time to get sound off to sleep."

As Blueskin had been informed by the person whose duty it was to take an accurate observation of every place that was to be entered, "The Grange" was completely surrounded by a high brick wall.

He had come provided with the means of surmounting it.

Upon reaching one particular spot, he opened the bag of tools, and took therefrom a bundle, which, when unrolled, proved to be a strong rope ladder.

Jack looked with great curiosity to see how it was to be made serviceable.

Then he noticed that to one end of the ladder was fastened a piece of iron, which curved over and formed two hooks large enough to hold on a wall.

Blueskin held this part in a particular manner with his right hand, while in his left hand he held the other end of the rope ladder.

He stood a little way from the wall, and swung his arm backwards and forwards.

Suddenly, then, after taking a very careful aim, he let go of the iron part, and up in the air it went.

As it descended, it caught upon the top of the wall, and Blake, by a sudden jerk, secured it there.

It made a sharp clinking sound as it struck against the brickwork, but it was so explosive that it was a thousand chances if it attracted notice, had anyone been about and heard it.

To throw the ladder so that the iron hooks should catch upon the top of the wall, of course required no small amount of dexterity and skill, but Blake, by long practice, was able to accomplish it with as much precision as a Mexican can throw the lasso over the neck of a wild horse.

Jack was quite lost in admiration.

"Wonderful!" he said. "If I had not seen it done I should never have believed it! That's what I call downright clever!"

"Oh! if that surprises you, you shall be astonished presently. That is the easiest part of the whole affair! Now, then, you go up the ladder first, and I will hold it steady at the bottom for you, as you are not used to it. When you get to the top sit astride the wall, and wait till I join you."

Jack Sheppard was very lithe and nimble, and he climbed up the ladder with the agility of a young squirrel.

On reaching the top, he, in obedience to Blueskin's instructions, seated himself across it.

Then Blake himself ascended.

Beneath them was a summer-house or arbour, which stood at the extremity of a little garden.

This garden was at the rear of the building, which was the part Blueskin had chosen at which to make his burglarious entry.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN BLUESKIN AND THE MASTIFF—THE DISCOVERY AND THE ALARM.

OUR friends—for such we think our hero and Jack are fairly entitled to be called—were certainly, as yet, only at the commencement of their work, but still, so far all had gone well. No alarm had been given, and they looked forward confidently to bring the matter to a successful issue.



[JONATHAN WILD PAYS A VISIT TO HIS PRISONERS.]

Cautioning Jack to be silent, Blueskin, without further loss of time, drew the rope ladder up, and reversing the hooks at the top, let it down on the other side.

They found it more than long enough to reach the ground.

For the same reason that he had before given—namely, to be enabled to steady the ladder for his less experienced companion—Blueskin was the first to descend.

Just, however, as he reached the ground, and before he could fairly turn round, a monstrous mastiff, which, during the night, was turned loose to guard the premises, uttering a suppressed and savage growl, sprang upon him.

Blueskin was totally unprepared for this attack. The spy who had reconnoitred the place had said nothing to him of the circumstance of a dog being at large during the night.

It was fortunate for Blueskin that he wore one of those huge neckcloths then in vogue, for the dog flew at his neck, and would unquestionably have bitten him severely

had not his teeth imbedded themselves in its voluminous folds.

The sudden dash with which the dog came against him, hurled him to the ground, but, recovering his presence of mind almost instantaneously, he clutched the brute with no gentle gripe by the throat, and immediately commenced to struggle with him.

His great aim was to prevent the dog making use of his voice, which would have infallibly aroused the people in the house.

Jack Sheppard, when he saw the mastiff make such a sudden attack upon his friend, was for a moment paralyzed with horror, but quickly arousing himself, he began to descend the ladder.

This, he found, was more difficult than he could have believed, for it swayed about in the most perplexing manner, and grazed the skin off his knuckles dreadfully.

In the meantime the fight continued.

He could hear Blueskin in a whisper calling to him to

come to his assistance, which he was sure he would not do if it were not necessary.

Fearing, then, that Blake should think he was holding back from fear, Jack let go of the ladder, and dropped the remainder of the distance.

He alighted on the soft mould with but little injury save the shake.

The dog, upon seeing approach another of his enemies, made a furious effort to get free from Blueskin's grasp.

But in vain.

"Quick, Jack, quick!" the latter exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "Quick, help me, or we are lost! Knife the brute—knife him, I'll hold him tight the while."

Acting upon this hint, Jack drew a very formidable clasp knife from his pocket, and crept forward to stab the dog.

But despite Blake's assurance that he would hold the dog tightly, he found it beyond his strength to do so, and they rolled over and over, and round about so fast, that it was hard to distinguish one from the other, and, certainly, to have made a stab with the knife would have been hazardous in the extreme.

But at last Jack himself grasped the brute with his left hand, and then with great suddenness plunged the knife just under his shoulder into his heart.

A torrent of blood gushed forth as he withdrew the knife, and the dog, in a moment ceasing his struggles, fell back quite dead.

The wound was instantaneously fatal.

Jack wiped his knife, and dragged the dog off the body of his friend.

It was a large and, doubtless, valuable specimen of his species, and it required all the strength of which Jack was possessed to move him when he was dead.

Breathless and exhausted, Blueskin rose to his feet.

Fortunately he had received no hurt from the dog, with the exception of such as had been inflicted by his claws, and these, painful as they were, Blueskin cared not for.

"That was a very narrow escape, Jack. Why didn't you come to my assistance earlier? You would have saved me a good deal of strength and one or two scratches."

"I came as soon as I could. The ladder swung about so that I could not get down. Look here, how it has served my hands, the skin is all off the back of them. I let go when I was half-way down, but as I lighted on a garden-bed it didn't much matter."

"We have both been in the wars. Confound the dog. However, let us be thankful it is no worse. Pick up the bag of tools again, it is just at the bottom of the wall, and come on as quickly as you can."

Jack obeyed; and in a minute or two after stood with Blake at the door which opened from the kitchen into the yard.

This the spy, who under the garb of a beggar, had a day or two before visited the place, was fastened merely by two bolts, one near the top and the other near the bottom of the door. There was no lock, but a drop latch only.

Acting then upon this information, Blake cut two circular holes in the door, through which he could introduce his hand, and then noiselessly drew back the bolts.

Jack's excitement was intense when Blueskin lifted the latch and opened the door.

As soon as they were inside, Blake lighted a dark lantern and cautiously looked about him.

All was well!

Beckoning Jack to come in silently, he closed the door; and again having recourse to the bag of tools, he took therefrom a couple of pairs of slippers.

These were of wadding, covered with silk, and made large enough to fit over the ordinary boots.

Of course, when they were on, their footsteps would be inaudible.

Blueskin handed a pair to Jack, and motioned to him to put them on.

This done, the next things he produced were two masks of black crape, which were sewn up into folds.

When the one which was given to him was on, Jack found that he could see through it with considerable distinctness, but Blueskin's face was perfectly invisible.

This, then, was an effectual precaution against their faces being recognized, if they should happen to be discovered. But Blueskin was so expert that this scarcely ever hap-

pened to him, yet, for all that, he never failed to provide against contingencies.

Having now effected an entrance, and made all their preparations, it remained, of course, for them to secure their booty as speedily as possible, and decamp.

Accordingly Blueskin unfastened the door leading from this kitchen into the interior of the dwelling, and passed through it.

They then found themselves on a square landing, from which ascended two steps leading to the principal or entrance hall of the mansion.

The silence of the grave prevailed, which even the presence of the two burglars did not break, for owing to the thick wadding slippers they had on their steps were perfectly noiseless.

Jack Sheppard followed his accomplice up the broad staircase in the hall conducting to the rooms above.

With the greatest certainty as to his course Blueskin ascended the second flight, and paused before a door at the extremity of a narrow passage.

Using the greatest caution he took hold of the handle and turned it gently round.

The door yielded.

But as it turned upon its hinges it made an ominous creaking sound.

Still it was not sufficient to awaken a sleeper.

The pair glided into the room.

The deep breathing of some person in a sound sleep reached his ears.

Blueskin carefully withdrew about an inch the dark slide which covered the lens of the lantern.

By the beam of light thus sent forth the whole of the apartment was bit by bit revealed.

On every side were tokens that no cost had been spared in the furnishing of it.

Heavy draperies, thick carpets, massive and gorgeously-carved and gilt articles—all combined to produce an air of perfect luxuriousness.

Blueskin placed the lamp on the floor, and sinking down crawled on all fours towards the bed.

Upon reaching it he lifted up the valance and peeped underneath.

What he sought was there.

It was a strong box.

Increasing, if possible, the caution which had characterized all his previous movements, Blueskin grasped with his right hand the iron handle in the end of it, and began with an exertion of strength of which few men would have been capable to drag it towards him.

As it slipped slowly and steadily, without a jerk, over the thick carpet, it scarcely made a sound.

To Jack, who stood watching his proceedings, it seemed to take an age to get the chest fairly out from underneath the bed.

But at last, and without the least noise being made, it was accomplished.

Blueskin paused a moment for breath.

He listened at the same time.

But as all in and about the place seemed to be in a state of utter repose, he proceeded to continue his operations.

His next act was to take a bunch of small-sized skeleton keys from his pocket.

He looked closely at the keyhole of the box, and then selected a key which he thought would answer his purpose.

Jack watched him with the greatest anxiety.

Having chosen a key, Blueskin placed it in the lock.

It turned slightly.

Imagining, then, that it was only necessary for him to exert a little force to make the key turn in the wards, he pressed upon the bowl.

Instead, however, of producing the expected effect, to his utter confusion and dismay a bright flash of light shot forth, which was immediately followed by a loud and stunning report, which would more than suffice not only to alarm one household, but a whole neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRONG BOX IS THE MEANS OF BRINGING DANGER ABOUT THE EARS OF THE TWO HOUSE-BREAKERS.

BLUESKIN, with a cry of pain and rage, sprang to his feet. Jack snatched up the lantern.

But the strong box—as if deeming the explosion not

sufficient, commenced making a noise of a different character.

In tone it greatly resembled that intricate piece of mechanism, a musical-box, only the sound was about a thousand times greater.

Evidently the box was made in a manner so as to best resist attack, for not only had the presence of a strange key caused a loud report, as if from a pistol, but also set some hidden machinery in motion, which created a clanging, ringing noise.

"Thieves! thieves! Murder! murder! Help! help! Thieves! thieves!" shouted a voice from behind the curtains of the bed.

It was succeeded by the loud ringing of a bell in some distant part of the building.

Everybody in the place would be aroused.

The position of the two housebreakers was most desperate.

For a moment Blueskin stood bewildered by the rapidity of the events which had occurred.

The clamour grew greater and greater.

But Blueskin quickly recovered his presence of mind.

He shut the chamber door, locked it, and shot two bolts into their sockets.

As he thus accomplished the, as it appeared to Jack, insane feat of making them prisoners, the tramp of hurried footsteps could be heard in the passage.

Blueskin turned away like lightning, and, rushing to the bed, drew back the heavy curtains.

"Murder! murder!" screamed a man, who was sitting up in bed, pulling a rope, which doubtless communicated with the bell which was still tolling loudly, "Help—help! Oh! murder! help!"

With no gentle hand Blueskin dashed the barrel of a pistol into the man's mouth, who, of course, was Mr. Hadley, the retired merchant, and occupier of the Grange."

"Cease your cries!" exclaimed Blake in a deep, stern voice, "and let go the rope, or, so sure as it is a pistol barrel which I have put into your mouth, you are a dead man."

Mr. Hadley fell flat back in bed.

He trembled with fear at the close approach of death.

But short as was the time this took, it was long enough to enable some of the inmates to reach the door.

They knocked violently when they found it fast.

But Blueskin had resolved upon a bold course of action.

It is just possible, considering the dreadful state of fright in which Mr. Hadley then was, that he might, by acting promptly, have made his escape.

But that, until his purpose was accomplished, was not what Blueskin wished to do.

"Open! open!" cried several voices at the door. "What's the matter! Open! open!"

Blake seized Mr. Hadley by the arm, and, exerting his utmost strength, pulled him out of bed.

The merchant, half-dead with fear, plumped down upon his knees as soon as he reached the door.

Blueskin shook him vigorously.

Then pressing the muzzle of the pistol against his forehead with sufficient force to cause considerable pain, he whispered in his ear impressively—

"Mr. Hadley, if you have any desire to see another day, you will reply as I tell you to reply."

"Yes, yes, good sir," was the answer, in an agony of trepidation. "Take all I've got, good sirs, but spare my life."

"Ah, now you talk sensibly. I would rather not shed your blood if I could avoid it; though I should not for a moment scruple to do so if I saw, or fancied I saw, a necessity. Repeat my words in answer to those without. If you do not, your blood be upon your own head; for I will assuredly blow your brains out. I should then, before your domestics could enter, have time to effect my purpose and escape."

While this took place the hammering and shouting at the door increased to a terrific extent.

"Now," said Blueskin, "speak after me. If your voice trembles in the least—if you fail to repeat my words correctly, or do anything to rouse a suspicion in the minds of those without that all is not right, that moment shall be your last. Do you understand?"

"Ye—es, good sir. Spare my life."

"Obey me, and I will."

"Who's there?" asked those without. "What's the

matter, sir? Is it thieves or fire? What was that shot? and why was the alarm-bell rung? Open! open!"

They paused for a reply.

"Repeat these words," whispered Blueskin: "Say, it's all right—there's nothing the matter."

Mr. Hadley made two or three abortive attempts to speak.

Then he gasped out rather than uttered—

"It's all right—there's nothing the matter."

This unexpected reply produced quite a consternation in the minds of those without—they glared at each other aghast.

"All right!" they repeated. "Nothing the matter? Why who rang the alarm-bell?"

"I did," replied Mr. Hadley, speaking after Blueskin. "I woke up dreaming and frightened, but it's all right now."

The servants, however, appeared far from satisfied and did not move.

"What are you stopping there for?" asked the merchant, still repeating after Blueskin, "Don't I tell you it's all right, and there's nothing the matter?"

"Yes, yes; you do!" replied a chorus of voices, "but you speak so strangely."

"What is it to you how I speak? Be off at once. To bed with you all. The one that dallies to obey my orders will be discharged to-morrow."

This threat had the desired effect, and the servants withdrew with, be it said, manifest reluctance.

There was something so artificial and contrary to his usual manner in the way their master spoke, that they felt sure something was amiss, though what that something was they could not conjecture; for had he not, with his own voice, told them that nothing was the matter.

In face of the threat of discharging anyone who lingered what could they do but retire?

Nothing.

It was, however, with uneasy consciences.

Blueskin waited and listened until he felt sure that everyone had departed.

Then he spoke to Sheppard, who had, from a variety of antagonistic emotions, stood perfectly still during the enaction of the extraordinary scene we have described.

"Pick up the lantern, Jack," he said, "and turn on the full light. Quick, now! there is no time to be lost if we are to accomplish our purpose and get off safely."

As he spoke he let go his hold of the merchant, who fell to the floor in a state of insensibility.

It was hardly possible for human nature to be proof against what he had endured. Indeed, that he should have stood up against it so long as he did is something wonderful.

As directed, Jack took up the lantern, and, turning back the slide, tolerably illuminated the apartment.

The clanging noise inside the box had ceased.

The machinery, which no doubt consisted of some cunning arrangement of springs and wheels, had run down.

If Blueskin had had the ordering of things, he would certainly not have allowed Mr. Hadley to go off in a swoon, but made him unfasten his strong box.

However, as it was, there was nothing left for him to do but to open it himself.

This he now had little fear in doing, for he calculated and with some show of reason, that it had done all in the shape of mischief that it was capable of doing till it was again put ready for action.

Knowing it to be customary with many people to sleep with the bunch of keys under their pillow, Blueskin went to the bed in the hope of finding Mr. Hadley's, for it of course stood to reason that the proper key would be the easiest to unlock the box with.

In this hope he was not disappointed.

A bunch of keys was there.

His practised eye enabled him to almost immediately select the proper key from the others in the bunch, and, on applying it to the box, he found it turn in the lock with ease.

He hastily lifted the lid.

The contents of the box almost dazzled him.

"Get the bag, Jack," he cried, "and slip these things into it. Bravo! it is a splendid booty, and well worth all the trouble it has cost us."

So saying, he rapidly turned out of the box a very

valuable service of plate, and, in addition to that, a casket, the contents of which he judged to be jewels.

Then, without devoting any further attention to them, he proceeded to examine the indorsements upon a number of little packages of papers.

Nearly all of these he contemptuously cast aside, but one or two he placed carefully in his breast-pocket.

But still he seemed in quest of something more, for, without pausing an instant, he kept tossing things out until at last the chest was quite empty.

While he was thus occupied, Jack had carefully stowed into the bag which contained their tools the whole of the dinner service, the casket, and a great many other objects of less value.

He finished just as Blueskin turned the last thing out, and he stood looking curiously at him.

It would not by any means be going too far to say that the number and diversity of events of which he had been cognizant during the past few hours had quite a confusing effect upon Sheppard's mind.

The imminent danger in which they had stood had unnerved him, and it is not at all to be wondered at that it did.

With the stock of the pistol with which he had threatened to take the merchant's life, Blueskin knocked against the walls of the iron chest in order to discover whether there were any hollows in it.

But there did not appear to be. No matter whereabouts he struck, a uniform solid sound was produced.

He was irritated at being unable to find what he sought.

It was a certain document, with the nature of which the reader will presently be made acquainted.

He rose up.

"Have you got all safe, Jack?"

"Everything," replied Sheppard, hoisting the bag on to his shoulder. "Here, you had better take the lantern."

"Yes. We have done a pretty good night's work, though what I wanted was not in the box."

"Indeed."

"No. It was a paper of great consequence to Jonathan Wild. But come, if we stay much longer it will be broad daylight by the time we reach London, and that will never do."

So saying, Blueskin unfastened and opened the door.

No sooner, however, did he cross the threshold, than a sudden dash was made at him, and a dozen hands clutched at different portions of his body and apparel, while a shout of exultation arose from many throats.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AVARICE AS USUAL SUCCEEDS IN DULLING JONATHAN WILD'S SUPERSTITIOUS FEARS.

BEFORE we proceed to relate what Blueskin did upon this occasion, it is absolutely necessary that we should revert to Jonathan Wild, and detail the sequel of the frightful events which occurred in the vaults beneath the old church at Tottenham.

It will be recollected that Jonathan, hearing a noise behind him, turned suddenly round, and beheld one of the coffins moving slightly, while from its interior a sound, the like of which he had never heard before, proceeded.

Attenuated already as his mind was by the ghastly objects wherewith he was surrounded, it is no matter of surprise that this spectacle should consummate the enchainment of his faculties.

Then, as with bursting eyeballs he gazed upon it, his senses received a still greater shock, for a fearful shriek—such as might, without any stretch of the imagination, be supposed to emanate from some damned soul when hurled headlong downwards to perdition—rent the air, which stagnated around him.

And then ere he had died away—horror of horrors! the coffin toppled over, and fell on to the floor of the vault.

Jonathan felt his senses were leaving him.

And yet before total annihilation supervened he was conscious that a bony hand had seized him with an iron grasp.

After that all was nothingness.

For the first time in his life, Wild swooned.

How long he remained in a state of syncope he had, of

course, no means of telling, but it was for no very great length of time, since the peculiar chillness of the atmosphere would naturally have a revivifying effect upon the system.

When he came back to life his brain was in a whirl.

It was some time before he could call to mind what had happened.

The rayless darkness puzzled him. It was long before he could form an idea of where he was.

A sensation of weight, too, was about his limbs, as though some heavy body was pressing on them.

But Jonathan's mind and memory were strong and lucid; so after a time it happened that he recollected all that had taken place up to a certain point.

What that certain point was the reader already knows.

For a few moments he was the slave to a fresh accession of superstitious terror.

But with admirable self-control he subdued it.

Then he slowly rose to a sitting posture, and drew his legs from under the heavy weight which was above them.

In this attitude he remained for a few seconds.

Every second his mind was getting clearer, and what was more, freer from ghostly dread.

He put out his right hand.

But he drew it back with an involuntary shudder of loathing and disgust.

It had touched something cold—icy cold.

Then in another instant he recollected what, from the peculiar feel, it must have been.

His lantern.

Nothing more.

His dark lantern, which he now remembered he had in his fright let fall.

It was with anything but repugnance, after having made this discovery, that he again extended his hand in the direction of the cold object.

But this time he was not so fortunate, for he made several fruitless attempts before he could succeed in touching it.

At last he found it.

With trembling eagerness he opened the little door and felt with his fingers if the wick was uninjured.

Yes, all was well.

In another moment he ignited it by means of a phosphorous match, for Jonathan always took the precaution—a good one under any circumstances—to have about his person the means of readily procuring a light.

The wick of the lantern flickered and spluttered a great deal before it caught light properly, and to prevent any current of air reaching it Jonathan closed the door in which the bull's eye was fitted.

Slowly and carefully he got upon his feet.

By the time he had drawn himself up to his full height a broad beam of light issued through the lens.

Then as he looked downward a frightful spectacle presented itself to his view.

Truly was it enough to freeze the blood.

The coffin which had in so inexplicable a manner tumbled off the shelf reached the floor with so much violence that it was burst open.

Within it, completely bathed in blood, was the disfigured remnants of a corpse.

Jonathan's heart heaved at the sight.

But what is it that causes such a sudden revulsion of feeling on the part of the thief-takers?

He no longer shrinks back as if horrified, but on the contrary bends downwards with the utmost eagerness.

It is because he sees sparkling with a rare effulgence in that darksome place the coronet of diamonds which the fond father had presented to his daughter as a nuptial gift, and which, in accordance with her strange desire, was buried with her.

It is that which he stoops to pick up.

As much as possible, he averts his eyes from the dead body while he does so.

Then, to his surprise, he finds it cling tightly, and he has to use some degree of violence to disengage it.

But at last it comes away in his hand, and he holds it so that the rays of the lantern fall with the greatest luminosity upon it.

Jonathan has not yet got to the end of the horrors of that place.

He starts.

His face turns of a ghastly, sallow hue.

The diamonds are dappled in fresh blood.

The setting itself is bruised and battered, and clinging to it is a quantity of dark brown hair.

"Good heavens!" said Wild, his voice for the first time breaking the silence of that gloomy place. "Are horrors to never cease? I see all now as plainly as though I had been witness to the whole. Would that I had never been tempted to come upon this errand, for this is a sight which, when I am alone and in darkness, I shall never be able to banish from my imagination. It is horrible in the extreme."

A fascination which he could not resist drew Wild's eyes to the loathsome sight upon the floor of the vault.

"Yes, yes," he said; "poor thing! Buried alive! I can easily understand how her morbid mind, for such it must have been, clung to the idea that her dream would be fulfilled, and so, at the moment, nature gave way, and she swooned. A swoon which her friends took for death."

"She must have revived, and found herself in her coffin. Imprisoned—in darkness—alone. I can fancy how she shrieked for aid when she realized her situation. How she called upon her husband—father—mother—brother—all without result. I can imagine, too, her frantic and futile efforts to free herself. How, as she writhed about, she struck the walls of the strong, leaden-bound coffin till her bleeding limbs were first bruised then broken. It must have been her head, as she struck it against the top and ends and sides which I heard, and which produced the sound for which I was at a loss to account. How terrible must have been her struggle to actually move so great a weight from its position! It must have taken a long time, and who can picture the extent of her agony the while? Then, at last, the coffin must have got so placed that but a slight thing would destroy its equilibrium. That was when I heard her give her death-shriek, as the coffin fell upon the floor. Well, well, after all, I ought to feel glad that I have arrived at a solution of the horrible affair. If I had not, it would have haunted me to the last day of my existence—as it will now—"

It was half to himself that Wild spoke these words. The reader will perceive they were simply the ideas which passed through his mind.

That he was correct in his conclusions there was every reason to believe. It can easily be accounted for, if we imagine her of an exceedingly sensitive organization. The idea of the so close prospect of marriage would of itself produce a great amount of mental excitation. Then a dream of so extraordinary a character as that which she was reported to have had, would, in such a subject, have a morbid tendency, and, in the end, cause a suspension of nature complete enough to deceive the best medical man in the universe, who did not happen to take precedent circumstances into consideration, and so be on the watch for such an event.

And so, unquestionably, the poor young thing, who one would have thought could scarcely have been worthy of so terrible a fate, was consigned to the grave alive.

Even Jonathan Wild, brutal as he was by disposition, grew almost pathetic in his words when the suffering she must have endured were forced upon him. It was probably the first time he had ever felt the sentiment of pity towards any one in his life.

Life now, however, was beyond all doubt extinct.

Well, indeed, was it so, and that the vital spark did not cling to that once fair casket, but now bleeding, mutilated mass of flesh.

Jonathan Wild slowly let the tiara, which he had undergone so much horror to obtain, drop from his hand.

He felt to take it away, covered with blood and matted with hair as it was, would be impossible.

It fell upon the floor for whom it had been intended.

Cowed and subdued by what had taken place, Jonathan proceeded to quit the place in which he had suffered more agony of mind than he ever had, or most likely ever would in any other.

As, however, he moved away, he suddenly remembered an occurrence which had yet to be explained.

CHAPTER XXV.

JONATHAN WILD AFTER ALL CARRIES OFF THE BRIDE'S DIAMOND TIARA.

"I HAD forgotten," said Wild, in a strange, hushed voice, as he held aloft the lantern above his head, and glanced in a scared fashion about him, "I had forgotten that—some one—a—caught hold of my arm. Who was it? Who was it, I say?"

All was still.

The fears which Jonathan had with so much difficulty kept in check now came throwing back with tenfold intensity.

And who could wonder at it.

Surely he must have been something either much more or much less than a man who would, under such circumstances, have evinced no signs of trepidation.

That it was not she who now lay so still in death that had seized upon him with such a convulsive grip was tolerably evident. Who then could it have been?

Fain would Wild have received an immediate answer to that question.

But none came.

Suddenly, however, he gave a start; the light of the lamp had fallen upon some dark object that looked like, and, yes, surely, must be a human being lying in another part of the vault.

A second glance showed Wild that he was not mistaken. It was a human body, and, by the attire, a male.

Who could it be that, at that ghostly hour, had followed Wild down the staircase?

Was it the husband?

Jonathan thought so.

He drew nearer, and then he recognized the clothing and the individual.

It was Quilt Arnold.

His presence there is easily accounted for.

From the moment that Wild entered the church a fierce and ungovernable curiosity arose in his breast to know what it was the thief-taker wanted in the vaults.

Dread of the consequences that would ensue if Wild found he had left his post for a long time kept him back, but even this failed presently.

Let the risk be what it might he determined to satisfy himself.

Now it by no means followed that because he had come to this determination he should take no measure to conceal this dereliction from duty from his master. On the contrary, he removed his shoes, and with only his stockings as a covering for his feet crept along the aisle of the church in the direction of the stone slab which he had assisted in removing.

He cautiously peeped into the abyss.

He could neither see nor hear anything.

But having come so far he determined not to turn back without doing what he wished, so he lowered himself through the aperture even as Wild his master had done, only Quilt, not being near so bulky, accomplished the feat with so much the greater ease.

He immediately discovered that the steps were thickly covered with sawdust.

This was most favourable to him, since it amounted to almost an impossibility for his footsteps to be heard.

He gained the door opening into the vault.

He peeped in.

Wild was standing with his back turned towards him, and holding the lantern close to the floor.

That was when Jonathan was looking for something upon which to stand.

Then Quilt heard the stifled cry.

The drumming noise.

His eyes turned in the direction whence it came.

He saw the coffin move, and fall off the shelf.

He heard the frightful shriek as it descended. His brain was pierced.

Overcome with the intense horror of the scene, he sprang forward at the moment when the lantern fell from Wild's hand.

Upon the impulse of the moment, upon thus suddenly finding himself in darkness, he grasped Jonathan's arm in the manner we have related, who, as we are also aware, fell backwards like one suddenly struck down by death.

Quilt Arnold let go his hold, and staggered two or three paces, as he thought, in the direction of the door.

But before he could tell whether he had 'aken the right direction, he felt his legs give way beneath him, and he, too, lapsed into utter insensibility.

No sooner did Wild see his officer, than he comprehended at once all that it has taken us some time to relate.

Take it for all in all, it was just one of those things which would elicit his utmost wrath.

The humanizing effect of the scene of horrors he had passed through was entirely dissipated. He lost sight of everything but rage at this disobedience of his orders.

"Curse you!" he said, and he dealt the unfortunate officer a couple of fearful kicks in the ribs. "So that's the way you treat me, is it? Get up with you, or curse you, I'll— Ah!"

A sudden thought struck Wild.

He would punish Quilt Arnold in a manner he would never forget.

He would leave him in the vault to come to his senses and get out as best he might.

Wild was quite himself again.

He chuckled gleefully.

"Yes—yes, Mr. Quilt. We'll see how you like waking up and finding yourself in the dark along with the dead. It will shake your nerves a little for you. Ha! ha!"

Wild's laugh always had a disagreeable sound, but it was more than usually apparent in that place consecrated to the remains of those who were no more.

His eye again fell upon the tiara, for the gems sent out numerous scintillations of light.

He had dropped it conscious of some feeling of remorse.

But now so complete and sudden a reversal of his feelings had taken place, that, cursing himself for a fool for having dropped it, he took it up again and, notwithstanding the loathsome state it was in, stuffed it into his coat-pocket.

This done he strode towards the door, and passing through closed it carefully after him. Had there been a fastening to it he would have fastened it also.

His great object now seemed to be to get out of the church with as much celerity as possible.

The stone he left just as it was.

"There is a little surprise in store for some one," he said. "I wonder who it will be."

He pulled the church door to after him.

But, however careless he might be about leaving traces to show that the church had been broken into, he was especially careful not to identify himself in any of them.

For this reason he stood in the porch and looked warily around before he ventured to emerge into the graveyard.

He listened too to hear if anyone was stirring.

But at that hour everybody in the village with the exception of himself was fast asleep.

Finding all quiet he passed down the smooth gravelled walk and through the little gate into the road, along which he walked hastily until he reached the meadow where by his orders the horses had been placed.

He led out his own and mounted him, and, turning his head in the direction of London, set forward at a sharp trot.

All the way he went the thought of what a shock it would give Quilt to come to his senses and find himself alone in a vault amused him vastly.

"Ha! ha! I fancy I see him now—poor Quilt! If he gets out of that all right, and don't go mad, or anything of that sort, I rather think he will feel more inclined to obey my orders, and not go prying where he isn't wanted. Ha! ha! It's a capital joke. I shall tell Blueskin of it. Ha! ha!"

Wild was never so facetious before.

But then think of the good day he had had.

And what was best of all, he had in addition the diamond tiara in his pocket, for returning which he fully expected to extort a sum very far indeed above its value.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JONATHAN WILD PAYS A VISIT TO HIS PRISONERS.

It was hard upon daybreak when Wild drew up in front of his own house in Newgate-street.

He was evidently expected by some one, for as soon as the horse stopped the door opened.

One of his men was on duty named Levee, and, going out, led his master's horse round to the stable.

Jonathan went straight up stairs.

He was weary.

Entering a room in which the different objects were just visible, he threw himself upon the bed, and was soon in a deep, sound sleep.

It was, however, disturbed by fantastic images, the result of what he had gone through during the night.

About ten o'clock he awoke, and, according to custom, took up his station in his office.

He did a good bit of business, but as it was simply in the trade, it is not worth while to trouble the reader with it.

The day was closing in when Mr. Wild left his office.

It was his custom always to stick to business.

He had half expected to have a visit from Lord Lugestrie, but the day passed quite away, and he did not make his appearance.

Then, as we have said, he got off his stool and directed his steps towards the upper portion of his house.

But when he had mounted a few stairs, he paused suddenly as a thought crossed his mind.

He placed his hands behind him, and pursued it.

Then, having come to a determination upon the subject, he slowly walked down stairs again.

He turned at the bottom, and made his way towards the cells.

The man who was stationed at the grating swung it open to allow him to pass through.

"Has Quilt come back yet?" asked Jonathan, in a surly voice.

"No, Mr. Wild, if you please sir, he has not."

"Ya—ah! Shut up. Where's Blue?"

"Aint seen nothink of him since late last night, Mr. Wild."

Wild strode along the subterraneous passage from which the cell doors opened.

"I suppose that Blue and that young Sheppard have gone to Hadley's crib at Kilburn? What's amiss, I wonder, that they don't come back? It will be awkward if he steals the paper, and it is found upon him. When once its existence is suspected, farewell to that scheme. And yet I think I can trust to Blue. He's my right hand, and no mistake."

By the time he had done in uttering these sentences the end of the corridor, if so it might be called, was reached.

The blank wall apparently was before him.

But only apparently.

Jonathan stooped down and pressed steadily on the corner of one of the stones with which the passage was paved.

A slight grating noise succeeded, and a secret door in the stone wall swung open.

Wild passed quickly through the opening and then closed the door again.

On the side, however, upon which he now was there was no attempt at concealment.

The door could be plainly enough seen.

Wild was now in a corridor very similar, so far as general appearance went, to the other one.

Before one of the cell doors, of which there were several, he paused.

It was the last but one from the end of the passage.

The locks all through Jonathan's house were constructed after one model, which enabled him, by carrying a master-key, to open any door he pleased.

This key he produced, and fitted into the lock before him.

It was attached to his neck by a steel chain.

Having unlocked the door, he next proceeded to withdraw the bolts, of which there were two, one at the top and one at the bottom.

Then, lifting up his foot, he kicked the door violently open.

So soon as this was done, he heard a great rustling as of straw from the interior.

Mingled with it was the clanking of a chain.

Then he heard a voice.

"Villain! away—away!" it said, in horrible screaming accents. "It is in vain you come to threaten. Do you

worst—do your worst, I say. While I can use the faculty of speech, I will defy you."

These words seemed to produce no effect upon Jonathan Wild.

Or if they did he took it very coolly.

With great deliberation he seated himself upon the sill of the door.

And here we should observe that this dungeon, like the rest, had its floor several feet below the level of the passage.

So as the great thief-taker sat in this rather peculiar position his legs hung down, but did not reach the dungeon floor.

As he thus sat, he was on a level with anyone who might be there.

Jonathan crossed his legs one over the other with an air of indifference, while with his right hand he played with that bloodthirsty weapon he called his pet.

He fixed his gaze upon the inmate of the cell.

It was a man—and by several little tokens evidently one of rank—but in such a frightful state of filth and emaciation, that he was terrible indeed to look upon.

He was secured to the wall by means of a heavy chain, which was rivetted round his waist.

Upon hearing the sound of Jonathan's voice, it would appear as though he had been suddenly inspired with strength, for he had raised himself on his hands and crawled as far towards the door as his chain would permit him.

Strange, indeed, was it, and indomitable and courageous to an extraordinary degree must he have been thus to breathe defiance to Wild, for what means had he of defending himself.

None whatever. The sound of his enemy's voice had inspired him with a factitious vigour, but he was nevertheless entirely at the mercy of the thief-taker.

And as Jonathan sat in that strange fashion on the stone step leading down to the dungeon, his face assumed an expression such as might well have become a fiend.

Two things were evident.

He treated his captive's menaces and threats with the utmost derision.

He looked upon his miserable state with satisfaction.

Few kindly feelings found a home in the breast of Jonathan Wild, and most assuredly pity for the sufferings of anyone was not one of them.

On the contrary, almost without exception, he furnished him with matter for delight.

With the most careless and indifferent air Jonathan leaned against the upright of the door.

The mocking smile which distorted his lips filled the wretched prisoner with infuriation.

Foam rose to his lips.

His eyes burned with vindictive hatred.

"Hence, villain!" he shrieked in his impotent rage.

"Hence, villain! Destroyer of my peace and happiness, begone! begone! Spare yourself the trouble of making another attempt to bend me to your hateful purpose, for I tell you it will be useless—quite useless. I defy you."

"Ha! ha!"

"You laugh at my defiance and my threats?"

"I am in a position to do so."

"But you will not always be, Jonathan Wild, not always. And when you are not beware."

"Fool!" exclaimed Jonathan, who began to lose his patience and his temper at the same time, "idiot that you are not to comply with my demands!"

"I will never do it, Jonathan Wild; you will never do it, and therefore I defy you to do your worst."

"Sir Marmaduke Morel, you are a traitor."

"And you, Jonathan Wild, are a villain."

"Granted that I am, still it does not negative my accusation. I tell you again, Sir Marmaduke, you are a traitor, and as such your life is forfeit to the sovereign you have outraged."

As Jonathan made this loyal and dramatic speech, he put his tongue in his cheek, and distorted his visage into a frightful leer.

"What good is it to me to deny it? Yet, good or not, so long as I have breath enough left in my body to utter a denial I will utter it."

"You are a Jacobite."

"You lie! to your teeth I tell it—you lie, Jonathan Wild, you lie! I am not a Jacobite."

"Ha! ha!"

"Laugh on, fiend, and mock me until you are weary. Full well do you know this charge has only been trumped up against me in order that you may extort money, and rob my children of their inheritance. But this time your plan will fail, Jonathan Wild—signally fail; for never, never will I succumb to you."

"We shall see presently," said Wild, still affecting unconcern, as, taking a short pipe from his pocket, he began to smoke with great deliberation. "You are obstinate, you have held out long, but you will be obliged to give in at last. If you had been wise, you would have done so at first; if you will take my advice, you will do so now."

The prisoner this time was silent.

The reaction was coming.

Excitement had up to the present moment set his weakness at defiance, but that excitement consumed itself.

He sank down upon the damp earth of which the floor of the dungeon was composed.

"You see," said Jonathan Wild, as he noted this circumstance, "I was in the right. You cannot hold out—you must give way."

Painfully the wasted wretch turned over on his side.

He spoke, but it was no longer in the wild, screeching manner which had previously characterized what he said.

His voice was hollow, and seemed like a strange half moan, half whisper.

"Jonathan Wild," he said, "you apprehended me on a warrant charging me with being a Jacobite and a participator in treasonous designs against my sovereign. You made me a prisoner, and conveyed me to this noisome place. No one can know better than yourself how entirely without foundation was the charge against me. I was innocent in word and deed. During all the party strife, which has been for so long prevalent, and which cannot fail to be fatal to the welfare of the kingdom, I have kept carefully aloof from the contending parties; have preserved a strict neutrality. Whatever my own convictions were, I never allowed them to transpire. Possessed of a sufficiency of wealth to enable me to maintain myself and family in comfort, I sought no more; but anxious for their own comfort and security, withdrew from the world, and secluded myself far from the haunts of men. But you, Jonathan Wild, like some foul and venomous reptile, coveted the little which I had, and in the attempt to obtain it have not scrupled to blast my happiness. As I say, you brought me here unjustly a prisoner, and wrongfully accused me, and then wished me to make my little all the price for my life and freedom. But no, Jonathan Wild, rather than exherediate my children from that which is theirs unalienably I would suffer the torments of the damned, and die a thousand deaths!"

Jonathan smoked on in silence. Neither by word nor act did he attempt to interrupt this long speech from his victim, who has already said enough to give the reader some ideas of the great wrong which he suffered at his hands.

Still more exhausted, the prisoner lay upon the flooring of the cell.

And yet only a week before he was robust and strong, but starvation and the darkness and dampness of his dungeon had literally brought him to the brink of the grave.

He was one of the many victims whom Jonathan Wild, under the pretence of their being rebels, contrived to apprehend and lodge in the vaults beneath his house.

Most people, when in this predicament, had been only too glad to sacrifice what they had in order to be released; for, as we stated in a former chapter, it had become notorious that should any one be accused by Wild of Jacobinism, it was just tantamount to being condemned, for conviction followed in every case.

It was injudicious on the part of the Government to employ such a man as Wild; but no doubt they thought they were acting for the best. At that time things were very different to the present. The country then was filled with malcontents, who were perpetually hatching fresh conspiracies.

Sir Marmaduke Osborn was a baronet, which title had been transmitted to him by his ancestors who had had it bestowed upon them for services rendered to their country.

Jonathan Wild had fixed upon him as being a likely

subject for him to commit his extortion upon, and, as we have seen, made him a prisoner. The price he set upon his release was that the whole of the estates belonging to Sir Marmaduke should be transferred to him.

This, the conversation which we have recorded, sufficiently shows he had resolutely refused to do, and he languished a prisoner in that dark cell.

Jonathan hoped he should tame him by resorting to the same means as those which are employed to tame brute beasts; but up to now he had failed to accomplish his end.

Whether ultimately he did so or not will transpire in the course of the narrative.

And during this time the wife and family of Sir Marmaduke were plunged into the deepest distress and doubt at his inexplicable disappearance; for there was nothing by which they could trace him to his present abode.

Observing that his prisoner still preserved his lifeless attitude upon the floor, Jonathan jumped down from his seat, and made his way towards him.

At his approach, however, Sir Marmaduke shrunk slowly and slowly back, as he would before some furious animal.

At last he reached the wall, and could go no further.

He leant himself against it, and fixed his eyes upon Wild's face.

For the life of him, Jonathan could not withstand that steadfast gaze.

"Are you going to add personal violence to what you have already done?" asked the prisoner. "Have I not suffered enough at your hands?"

"Comply with my demands," replied Wild fiercely. "I will not be set at nought by you any longer."

"I will never comply. A thousand times over, were such a thing possible, would I sacrifice my life rather than I would my possessions."

"But I do not want your life. It is your estates, and I will have them, too. Besides, you seem to forget that if you are punished as a traitor your goods pass away from your family just the same, and are confiscated to the Crown."

"Villain! diabolical villain!" murmured the prisoner, as this conviction was forced upon him. "Surely there will come a day when you will have to answer for all this!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wild. "I am perfectly willing to take the responsibility of answering for my actions."

"Time will show that—time will show that. Again, I say, Jonathan Wild, do your worst. I care not."

"I shall give you till to-morrow to decide."

"It is useless. You can take my answer now."

"No."

"I say, yes."

"You don't know. Not yet have you known the bitterness of starvation, but you shall know it. I say again I give you till to-morrow to decide. I shall come then, Sir Marmaduke, and I hope by that time you will see the wisdom of doing as I desire. If not, I shall at once bring you to trial, and then your fate is sealed. You shall die as a traitor an ignominious death, and the name of Osborn shall be execrated in all future generations. What you have inherited shall be swept away from them. Thus not only do you destroy yourself, but you destroy them also."

Well was it for the safety of Jonathan Wild that his captive was so powerless as he was. His words excited him to frenzy, and had he been capable of it he would have made a desperate attempt upon the villain's life.

But Wild knew that he was safe.

He waited for a reply.

None came.

"You are thinking over what I have said, I hope," added Jonathan, after a pause of some moments. "Surely now you must see that it is best. Look, here is a deed transferring your estates to me. It is a legal instrument drawn out to my instructions."

As he spoke Jonathan took a folded paper from his pocket.

"Sign this," he said, unfolding it, "and you are a free man instantly. You have yet strength to do it. Come."

Sir Marmaduke held out his hand for the paper.

With a smile of exultation Jonathan gave it to him.

For a moment the unfortunate gentleman looked with fading vision at the paper.

Tears filled his eyes.

Through the mist he fancied he could see his wife and children driven from their homes, wanderers upon the face of the earth, their name bearing the brand of infamy.

That would be the result if he still persisted in refusing compliance with Wild's demands.

On the other, although his possessions would pass away from him, yet he would remain. Disgrace would not affix its stigma to his name. He would be able to exert himself for their maintenance, which he was certainly better qualified to do than they.

He wavered.

Jonathan observed it, and already congratulated himself upon the triumph he had achieved.

But then the conviction of his own entire innocence arose in Sir Marmaduke's mind, and though he knew that his judge would be prejudiced against him, yet he thought surely he would not be suffered to perish.

He determined not to barter away his birthright, but to trust himself to a trial.

Then, to the confusion of Jonathan, his prisoner crushed up the paper which had been given him, and feebly threw it from him.

"Never—never," he said. "I am innocent. Once more do your worst."

With these words, a faint spasm convulsed the frame of the unfortunate knight, and, closing his eyes, he fell backwards as though bereft of life.

"Confound him," said Wild, as he stamped his foot. "Confound him. But no matter—no matter. I can wait. He has hesitated, and now I shall conquer."

He stooped down and shook Sir Marmaduke roughly, but he was quite unconscious.

"Curse his contumacy! I never had so much trouble with any one before. Never mind; it is worth my while. To-morrow I will visit him again, and doubt not that I shall succeed in bringing him to sign the paper. I will take it and put it back. How he has crumpled it, to be sure."

As he spoke, Wild picked up the paper, and carefully smoothing it out, put it back into his pocket.

He scrambled then up the high steps into the passage beyond.

Then casting one more glance at the inanimate form of his prisoner, Jonathan closed the door and fastened it securely.

This done, he retraced his steps, and, reaching the hall, again ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN FIND IT A MUCH MORE DIFFICULT MATTER TO LEAVE "THE GRANGE" THAN THEY DID TO ENTER IT.

THE strange adventures and proceedings of Jonathan Wild have now for some time occupied our attention, but as he is in no immediate danger we feel it an imperative duty to turn to two other characters, who were, and in whom we hope a greater interest is felt than there can be in the villainous thief-taker, whose conduct in the case of Sir Marmaduke nothing whatever could excuse.

The two characters to whom we allude are, as the reader more than expects, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

It will be remembered that we left them in a position of great peril.

The servants, satisfied that something was wrong, had crept back silently to the door of their master's room and listened.

They heard the conversation which had passed between the two burglars, and had therefore little difficulty at arriving at the facts of the case.

With a boldness for which they deserved commendation they resolved to lay in wait at the door, and as the two midnight intruders passed out pounce upon them at unawares.

One of their number, too, they sent to obtain additional assistance.

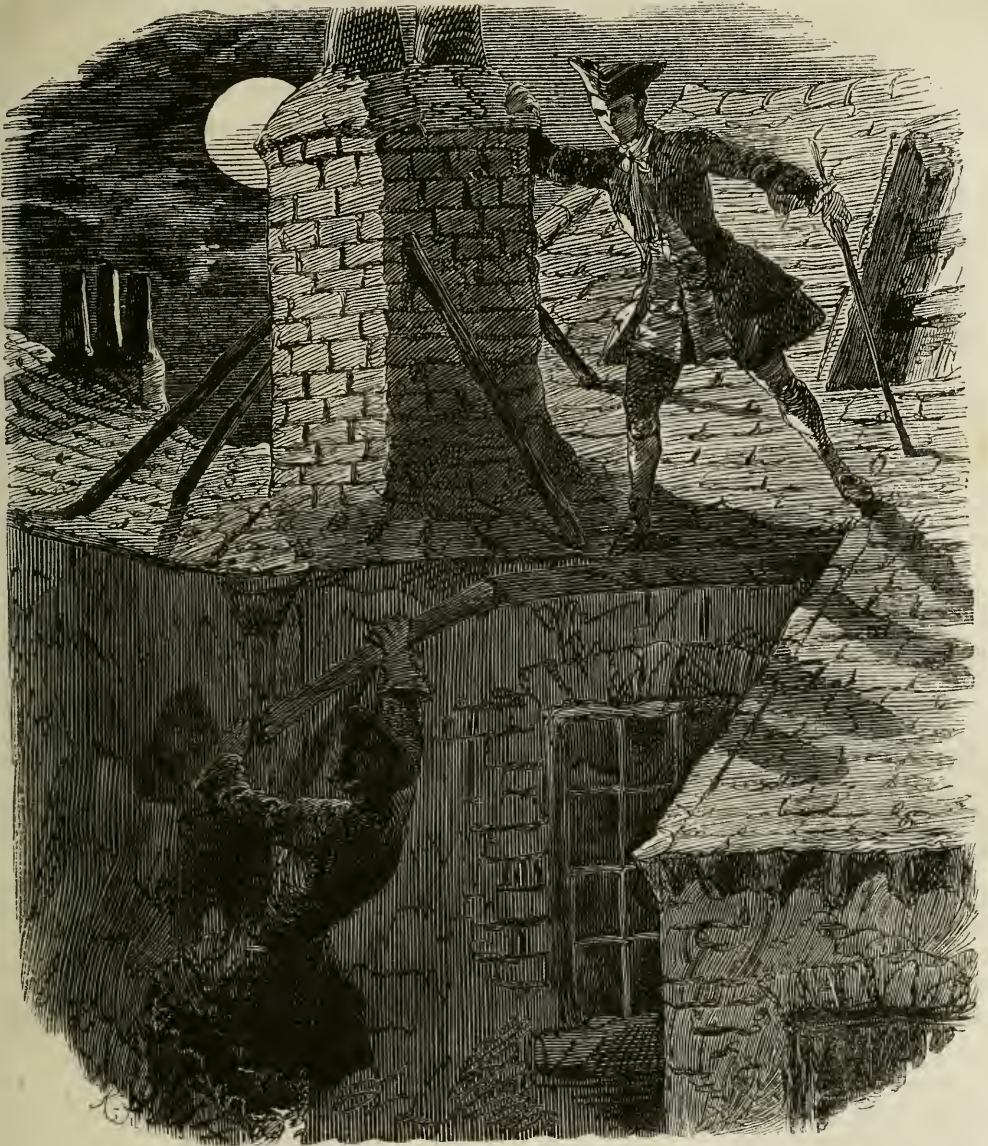
It was only for a second that Blueskin lost his presence of mind.

ropping the lantern which he held in his hand he clenched both fists, and struck out at his foes.

But they were many to contend against.

Very soon, however, they found they were getting the worst of it.

As for Jack, he had not been molested. As Blueskin



[BLUESKIN AND SHEPPARD ESCAPING FROM "THE ORANGE."]

preceded him, he was in time to see the attack upon his friend and to draw back from the danger.

But it was with no intention to desert his friend that he drew back: it was to put down the bag of plate, and so soon as he had done so he sprang forward to his assistance.

The sudden rush that he made among the servants was very effective, and two or three were driven back.

But, seeing Jack was such a stripling, they made sure it would be a very easy task to obtain a victory over him.

But never were appearances more deceptive than they were in this case, and so they quickly found.

Blueskin quickly enough discovered that he could do little more than shake off his foes.

This was a state of things that could not possibly be continued. He felt sure that before long others would come to their assistance, and resistance would be vain.

So, waiting for an opportunity, which very quickly oc-

curred, he drew two pistols from his pockets, and, cocking them, took a deliberate aim.

At the sight of the fire-arms the servants drew back. Like all those who are unaccustomed to them, they dreaded them much more than they really deserved to be, which was owing to the exaggerated idea they entertained of their powers of mischief.

"Stand back, every one of you," cried Blueskin, in a stern voice. "Stand back, or by heaven I will blow the brains out of the one who does not!"

The fierceness and resolution with which these words were uttered made the servants involuntarily move a few steps backwards.

Blueskin was not slow to perceive the advantage he had gained, and so, like a skilful general, he followed them up, and drove them before him down the passage towards the staircase.

When he saw the turn matters were taking, Jack extricated himself from his assailants, and, re-entering Mr

Hadley's bed-room, brought out the bag containing the booty.

The servants shrank back further and further before the muzzles of the pistols, but, just as they were about to beat a retreat they heard their master shout to them to stand fire.

Mr. Hadley, who had recovered from his swoon, emerged into the passage; he, too, held a brace of pistols in his hands.

He took a steady and deliberate aim, and pulled the trigger.

Jack felt a sudden cessation of pulsation about his heart, and the blood turned cold in his veins as he heard the click of the pistols.

But they flashed only in the pan.

This, doubtless, was owing to the time they had been disused.

The servants turned and fled.

Blueskin turned round suddenly, and fired one of the pistols along the passage in the direction of Mr. Hadley.

A loud report filled the air, and was succeeded by a cry and a fall.

"By Jove you have hit him, Blueskin," said Jack, as he looked half terrified around.

"Never mind him," replied his companion. "Follow me at once. If I mistake not we have by no means got to the end of our difficulties. Quick—quick!"

He rushed down the staircase as he spoke, Jack following closely at his heels.

But they did not descend the flight that led from the first to the ground floor.

A number of men were congregated in the hall.

The servant, who had at the commencement of the affray been sent out for assistance, had returned, bringing a formidable force with him.

The situation of the two housebreakers was critical in the extreme.

But Blueskin was prompt to act.

"Back, Jack!" he said. "We can't fight against such a lot as that, unless we entrench ourselves somewhere so as to gain an advantage over them. Back—back!"

Sheppard had no choice in the matter, so he perforce obeyed the directions given him, and, turning round, re-ascended the stairs.

The retreat of the burglars had of necessity an emboldening influence upon those below, and they rushed up the broad staircase in a tumultuous throng.

On the second landing Blueskin paused a moment to look round, but perceiving no place where he could make a successful stand, he ran up another and narrower flight of stairs.

They were closely followed by their pursuers.

The heavy bag of plunder was a great incumbrance to Jack, but he kept up bravely.

This narrow staircase was, of course, well adapted for defence, though Blueskin could by no means see his way to ultimate escape; for that they would be able to overcome or even keep at bay, for any length of time, so many foes was beyond the bounds of possibility.

As soon as they reached the top of these narrow stairs, Blueskin fired his remaining pistol.

The men who were ascending were packed so closely together, that the shot could not fail to be most effective.

A scene of the greatest confusion followed.

Then Blueskin flung, in quick succession, both his discharged weapons down the staircase.

It was the best use he could put them to, for he would have no opportunity of loading them again.

Then, with great rapidity, Blueskin drew another brace of pistols from his pocket, and discharged them simultaneously, and flung the weapons at the heads of his foes.

This vigorous and deadly resistance struck a panic into the hearts of the domestics and those who had come to their assistance, and they hesitated to advance.

At the moment when he fired this last volley Blueskin heard Jack calling to him in a suppressed voice.

Then a rush of cold air blew upon him.

Being unprovided with fire-arms, Jack had taken no part in the affray, and therefore turned his attention to the discovery of some means of escape.

The first thing his eyes lighted upon was a ladder resting against the wall.

Immediately over the top of this ladder was a trap-door.

Quick as thought Jack ascended the ladder.

The trap-door was secured by a couple of bolts, and these Sheppard without much difficulty withdrew.

It was then he called to his companion.

The trap-door, was, on the outside, covered with lead, and consequently very heavy; but, exerting all his strength, Jack pushed it open.

As he expected, it was a means of reaching the roof-tops of the mansion.

Without another moment's delay, and before those below could recover from their panic, Blueskin sprang up the ladder, and was out on to the tiles as soon as Jack was.

Then with great presence of mind, he, hearing that the men were rushing up the stairs, pulled the ladder up after him, and closed the trap-door.

Some little time must now elapse before the pursuers could reach the roof, and it was obviously the best policy for our friends to descend as quickly as possible by some other means.

But this was no easy task: an apparent impossibility, in fact, for neither could at all see how it was to be accomplished.

They had not much time to spend in deliberation.

"There is only one way of doing it, Jack," said Blueskin, who had made a rapid but careful examination of the roof.

"And what is that?"

"To descend this pipe here in the angle of the building. Do you think you could manage it?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BURGLARS CONVEY THE "SWAG" TO WILD'S WAREHOUSE IN THE HORSEFERRY, WESTMINSTER.

JACK SHEPPARD looked rather scared as he contemplated the very hazardous mode of descent proposed by his comrade, and then shook his head.

He might well be excused for feeling rather dubious, for it really did not seem possible for a cat to descend.

In one corner of the building was an iron pipe, used for conveying the rain-water off the roof to a cistern below.

In diameter it was about four inches.

"It is our only hope," said Blueskin, "and we had better risk that than stay here and be taken, as we assuredly shall be if we delay much longer."

"We shall; that's true enough."

"I will go first, and you can follow me."

"Agreed; I would rather you try it first. But what shall I do with this bag of swag?"

"Oh! drop it down."

"But the plate?"

"Oh! it won't signify if it is bruised a bit. Drop it."

"Very good," said Jack, and leaning forward he let the bag fall from his hand.

It was heavy, and fell swiftly.

It reached the earth with a jingling sound.

"Now then, Jack, I'm off; watch how I do it."

Taking every precaution, Blueskin set about commencing the perilous descent.

He laid himself flat on the tiles, and gradually lowered himself until he reached the parapet.

The edge of this he clutched tightly, and so hung for a moment.

The iron pipe was within a foot of him, so, cautiously shifting one hand, he at last grasped it.

Then he shifted his other hand.

Jack grew dizzy to see him.

But with the greatest caution Blueskin descended by the pipe. He scratched his hands and knees in the process, but for such trivialities as those he did not care a jot.

In a very short space of time, considering the difficulties he had to contend against, he reached the ground.

But Jack did not wait until his comrade had done this, but when he was only about halfway down had begun to descend also.

Of the two Jack got down easier, which was owing as much to his slowness as his agility, and, in fact, he was by the side of Blueskin before that individual was aware that he had more than commenced his very perilous journey.

However, he was glad there was no more delay, for the

trampling of many feet told him that the servants were already on the scent.

"Confound it," said Blueskin, as he picked up the bag and ran across the yard with it in the direction of the wall where the rope-ladder was hanging. "Confound it! This is one of the most troublesome jobs I have ever had in my life. Look sharp, or our retreat will be cut off, after all."

Jack increased his speed, and there was good reason that he should do so, for lights were flashing about in all directions.

Very fortunately the ladder was not far off, and they reached it in a few seconds.

"Now, Jack, up with you. Quick! I will follow."

"And the swag?"

"I'll see to that. I will tie it to the bottom of the ladder, and draw it up after me."

"Capital! You would have found it rather difficult to carry up with you."

It was easy enough to climb up the ladder while Blueskin held it steady, and Jack was soon on the top of the wall.

While he was going up, Blueskin had tied the bag to the last round of the ladder.

Then he himself mounted it, and seating himself astride the wall, commenced to haul up the booty.

But at this moment the servants reached the wall, and one man, who looked like a gamekeeper, or something of that kind, had a double-barrelled gun in his hand.

"Come down there," he shouted, raising his piece and covering our friends with it, "Come down, or by heaven I'll blow you both to atoms!"

Before he had finished his speech though, Blueskin had drawn up the ladder and lowered it on the other side.

"Over the wall, Jack, and hang by your hands," he cried, as he himself slipped down the ladder, "and then follow me."

Jack did as he was bid, and then arose the report of the gun.

Its discharge was harmless.

Before the echo had died away, Blueskin was standing at the foot of the ladder, and he was directly afterwards rejoined by Sheppard.

Still they were far from safe.

The plunder though was all right, and so as he considered himself the stronger, Blueskin picked it up, and set off at such a run, that Sheppard had as much as he could do to keep up with him.

After going at this pace for about a hundred and fifty yards, he slackened speed and looked back.

No signs of pursuit could be seen, so they went on at an easier rate.

The horse which they had left in the lane fully justified Blake's assurance that he would not stray away. In fact, he was on the identical same spot.

The bag of plate was thrown into the cart by Blueskin, who mounted and took the reins, while Jack scrambled in after him.

The horse was refreshed by his halt and banquet in the lane, and, without any incitement, went along at a fast trot that got over the ground in a most surprising manner.

As they turned the corner of the Edgware-road into Oxford-street they saw before them, on the eastern horizon, the first faint flush of coming day.

But still, in the opposite quarter of the heavens, the moon shone with a brilliancy as yet undimmed.

To Jack's surprise, instead of making direct for the stables in Long-acre, Blueskin turned off towards Westminster.

"Where are you going?" Jack asked.

"To Jonathan's crib in the Horseferry, where he keeps the swag."

CHAPTER XXIX.

RETURNS TO QUILT ARNOLD, WHO WAS LEFT BY WILD IN THE VAULTS BENEATH TOTTENHAM CHURCH.

HALF-AN-HOUR after Jonathan mounted his horse and rode off towards London, Quilt Arnold began to exhibit some symptoms of returning animation.

He moved slightly, and a faint groan came from his lips.

The two kicks which Jonathan administered had damaged his anatomy a little.

It was pain, doubtless, that brought him back to life.

At first he was very confused.

He felt a terrible aching pain every time he drew his breath or attempted to move.

Quite at a loss, too, he for some moments tried to recollect where he was and what had happened.

He opened his eyes and his confusion increased.

He could see nothing.

For a moment a horrible idea entered his mind, and he felt his blood grow suddenly cold in his veins, while he turned heartsick with apprehension.

He fancied he was blind.

The agony he endured while that thought had possession of him was intense indeed.

And it is not at all to be wondered at that he should be seized with such a conceit, for so black was all around that he could perceive no more difference when he had his eyes open than he could when he had them closed.

He remained still, and strove to think.

To recollect what was the last events that had happened to him.

But so excited and nervous had he become that memory for a time eluded him.

Gradually, however, came back to him the remembrance of all that had occurred on that to him night of horrors, up to the point where Jonathan uttered his frightful yell and let fall the lantern.

After that he could remember nothing except Wild had slipped from his hold, and that he had, in a devious, uncertain kind of way, endeavoured to find the outlet to the vault.

"That is it," he thought, when he had reached this point in his recollections. "I—I am not blind! but in the vault with the dead."

And now, when the conviction that he was not blind, and that his inability to see arose only from the fact that there was no means by which a ray of light could enter to dispel the darkness, he grew more composed.

With much pain and difficulty he raised himself to a sitting posture.

Then so great an accession of pain came over him, that if his back had not happened to lean against the wall, he must have fallen back on the floor of their vault.

But this pain was produced only by change of posture, and in a little while its intensity abated.

Like most others of his profession Quilt never failed to carry about with him a ready means of procuring a light, and now the first thing he did was to feel in his pockets for matches.

These he produced, as well as a small piece of wax candle.

The atmosphere in the vault was of so humid a character, that it was only after a severe struggle that the candle caught light at all, and then the flame was weak and sickly.

But Quilt's eyes had become so accustomed to the darkness, that to him the feeble light was quite sufficient to illuminate the vault.

He raised himself to his feet, and then found the acute pain in his ribs had greatly subsided.

"W-where's Jonathan?" he asked, as he glared about him, and held the candle so as to make it pretty equally diffuse its rays over the entire vault. "Where's Jonathan?"

But, of course, no Jonathan was to be seen. At that moment he was half-way on his road to his own house in Newgate-street.

Quilt had not yet noticed the coffin.

That was a little surprise in reserve for him.

Presently, however, his eyes fell upon the ghastly and loathsome object.

In his agitation it is a great wonder he did not drop his light.

But though it shook about a great deal in his grasp it did not fall.

"Good heavens!" he said, "what horrible work has Wild been at here! Surely he must be a fiend, for who but a fiend would mangle a corpse thus? What earthly object could he have had, I wonder?"

From these words of Quilt Arnold the reader will perceive he had fallen into a mistake, for upon seeing the disfigured body he very naturally concluded it must be some of his master's handiwork.

The more he looked, though, the less probable this supposition seemed, and then again he asked himself where Jonathan was, and how he came to leave him in the vault?

"I must get out of this frightful place," he said, after an ineffectual effort to collect his thoughts. "I must get out of this place, and then, perhaps, I shall be able to think."

Having come to this conclusion, he made his way across the vault to the iron door.

When he saw it closed his heart sank suddenly like a lump of ice in his breast; but, to his joy, he found it open to his hand.

To spring up the stairs, and through the narrow aperture into the nave of the church, was but the work of a moment.

Then he stopped to think.

After a while he spoke.

"Jonathan must have left me there," he said. "He recovered and found I had disobeyed him. That was his idea of punishing me. Bah! I am not such a fool as to be frightened by dead bodies, though when I saw that coffin move off the shelf and heard Wild yell out I was scared a bit, I'll allow."

He walked slowly up and down the aisle of the church.

As he was shoeless, having, as the reader will remember, divested himself of that part of his clothing in order to approach Jonathan unheeded, he glided up and down with the silence of a ghost.

"I can't make it out," he said. "It puzzles me entirely; and yet I should uncommonly like to know what he wanted there, and I will, too, I'll warrant. Who knows it may be something that will place Wild as much in my power as I am in his. That would be glorious. To think of being able to say, 'Be civil, Johnny, or I'll have you hanged at Tyburn next sessions.' He! he! Fancy saying that. Oh! it would be prime! I should be able to pay off a little then of what I owe him. He! he!"

Quilt was so delighted with this prospect that he for a little while forgot everything that had just taken place, and where he was as well, but he was suddenly recalled to himself by a return of the pain in his side.

At every breath he drew he felt as though some one stabbed him in the vitals.

He groaned, and was obliged to seat himself upon a bench that was close at hand.

The paroxysm was doubtless produced by the laughter he had indulged in, for now he was quiet, and only partially inflated his lungs, the pain was much easier.

"How came I by this hurt?" he said. "I felt nothing of it when I went into the vault. It must be there then that I received it. But how?"

He leaned his chin upon his hands, and strove to think.

"Could I have done it in my fall? No, I don't think that could be. Stop. Jonathan recovered first—saw me there. All is plain now: it must have been him that mauled me in this fashion.

"The skin is unbroken," he continued. "What was it? Has he kicked me, I wonder, with those heavy boots of his? I suppose so. If he has, it is a mercy my ribs are not broken, and I don't know now but what they are."

To the best of his belief, however, after making as good an examination as he could, the bones were whole.

"I must get out of this, and at once, too. I am a fool for having stayed here so long. I do not want to have to answer for what Jonathan has done down in the vault. But for his treatment of me he shall suffer. I swear it—I swear it!"

Wild had raised up another enemy.

"I will bide my time, though," he said, gloomily. "I will bide my time. Vengeance will be done at last, and it will be none the worse for keeping. Dearly, dearly shall you rue this. Oh! curses! curses!"

Quilt had forgotten himself in his excitement, but the pain in his side soon brought him to himself.

Slowly he dragged himself out of the door of the church.

He stopped upon the steps to put on his boots.

All around him was very still. The wind and the rain had gone, and now it was a calm, fine night.

Not the faintest breeze seemed to shake the leaves on the yew-trees in the churchyard.

It was fortunate for Quilt that no one was abroad, that no curious eye saw him leave the sacred building, or he would have found himself in a ticklish situation.

Down the gravel walk—his feet seeming in the stillness

to make a tremendous noise—he went, and out at the little swinging gate into the lane.

"The horses were in the paddock," he said, "but of course Jonathan has taken them with him. Curse him. I expect I should find it no easy matter to mount. I must even go as I am."

It seemed a long walk from Tottenham, but much to his relief he found the pain constantly and steadily abating.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he reached London.

He did not repair straight to Newgate-street, but visited a friend of his who had a public-house on Clerkenwell-green.

Here he remained during the whole of the day, uncertain how to proceed; and towards night, finding himself almost well, he directed himself to Jonathan's house, and was admitted.

The first intelligence he received was that Wild had been inquiring after him.

But other and more important matters must now have our immediate attention.

CHAPTER XXX.

JACK SHEPPARD IS INTRODUCED TO WILD'S WAREHOUSE IN THE HORSEFERRY, WESTMINSTER.

In a former chapter we have already at some length described the manner in which Jonathan Wild carried on his business transactions in Newgate-street.

We have seen how Pinching Tom brought him the necklace which he had stolen from Lady Ingestrie.

But although small articles were sometimes in this way brought to Jonathan direct, yet it was not the usual course, nor was it that pursued with plunder of a more bulky description.

The great thief-taker was by far too politic to keep in his house anything that could compromise him in any way should the authorities take it into their heads to search his domicile.

In consequence it became a necessity to have another establishment, where the goods could be safely warehoused.

Acquainted with every part of London as Jonathan was, he soon found a place suitable for his purpose.

This was a solitary public-house in the Horseferry, Westminster; then a desolate and fearful place.

One of his men, who was known by the name of John Oaky, and who was entirely in his power, Jonathan installed in this house ostensibly as its landlord.

To a casual visitor, and sometimes such did drop in, the house presented in all respects a very ordinary appearance. There was nothing whatever to engender suspicion.

It was then towards this place that Blueskin directed his cart.

By the time they arrived at the "Ship and Rainbow"—for such was the sign of the public-house—it was broad daylight, and people were beginning to move abroad.

Upon hearing the grating of the wheels, John Oaky, the landlord, ran to the door, and, as soon as he saw Blueskin, he precipitately retreated into his house.

At the side of the building was an opening leading into the yard at the back of the public-house, and down this Blueskin turned.

Oaky was standing there waiting to receive them.

"All right?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Blueskin, as he scrambled out of the cart. "Where's the ostler?"

"Jack will be here in a minute."

"I am going to stay for an hour or two, so let the horse have a good feed the while."

"Very good. Are you hurt, captain?"

"Just a little, but it is nothing to speak of."

"And who is this youngster?" inquired the landlord, pointing to Jack, who had also descended from the cart.

"A fresh hand."

"Oh! indeed."

"You would know his name, John, if you heard it."

"Very likely."

"And be very much surprised, for his father was an old particular of yours."

"Who is he, then?"

"His name," said Blake, "is Jack Sheppard!"

"Sheppard?"

"Yes."

"The son of poor Tom Sheppard?"

"He is."

"Wonders will never cease. Here, Jack, lad, give us your hand! I'm glad and proud to see you. Why, Joe, now I come to look at him, they're as like as two peas, as the saying is."

"They are; but where's your ostler? Why don't he come?"

"I don't know. Hi! Jack, Jack!"

"Here you are, guv'nor."

"Look sharp," said Oaky, "take the nag out, and give her a good feed of corn. We'll put the cart under the shed."

He exchanged a meaning glance with Blueskin as he spoke.

The horse was taken out of the shafts and led into the stable, while Oaky, going to some large double doors, took a key out of his pocket and opened them.

Jack looked inside this place with some curiosity, but he was disappointed in his expectations of seeing anything remarkable.

It was a common, tumble-down looking place, littered over with straw.

Between them they easily ran the cart into the shed, and as soon as they had done so Oaky transferred the key from the outside to the inside of the door, and locked them in.

"Now, Blueskin, where's the swag?"

"Hush! Some one may overhear you. Be cautious."

"All right. There's nothing to fear."

"Here it is, then," said Blueskin, producing the bag containing the plate and other valuables they had stolen.

"It's a fair lot, any how."

"Not amiss. But come, don't let us lose time unnecessarily."

"You trust Jack here?"

"With everything. You have no more need to be afraid of him than me."

"That's the style then. We will soon let him into a secret or two."

Upon hearing this Jack kept a wary eye upon all that was going to be done.

In the first place Oaky removed the straw from one portion of the floor of the shed which was formed of square slabs of stone.

Then taking from his pocket a curiously-fashioned instrument, Oaky next proceeded to insert it into a small round hole in one of the stones.

He gave it one half turn round and it became fixed.

As this instrument now formed a kind of handle he seized it with both hands, and exerting his utmost strength, lifted the stone from its setting, disclosing a steep flight of steps beneath.

Oaky descended them and held up his hands to receive the bag which Blueskin gave him, and then followed, at the same time telling Jack to do likewise.

The desire to know something more of the mysteries of Wild's business was very strong in Jack's breast, so he obeyed with alacrity.

The steps were only six in number, and terminated in a small cellar-like place, which, however, was piled up with packages tied up and labelled like those in a pawnbroker's ware-room.

These were articles which Wild anticipated an application for.

The temperature of the place was almost like an oven, so that Jack concluded there must be a concealed fire somewhere, though to what uses it was put or intended he could form no notion.

Besides, his attention was pretty well occupied in watching the proceedings of Blueskin and John Oaky.

One by one the various objects which had been crammed into the bag were taken out, examined, and sorted into two heaps.

"There will be no hope of Jonathan's being able to restore these things in safety, and the sooner those that can be identified are disposed of the better it will be for all parties concerned."

"Very good, Mr. Blake. In course, in Mr. Wild's absence, I take my orders from you. Then you would like to have these run down at once?"

As he spoke, the quondam landlord pointed to the largest of the two heaps.

The articles that composed it were for the most part

the service of plate, upon every piece of which was engraved the arms and crest belonging to Mr. Hadley's family.

"Certainly," said Blueskin, "there ought to be no delay whatever."

"There shan't be; they shall be run down at once. I'll carry as many as I can; you and Jack must bring the remainder."

This was done, and between them they contrived to carry it all to a recess at the further end of the vault, and which Jack had not before noted.

In this recess was fitted a small furnace, and this was the source whence the heat emanated.

An iron crucible of a very large size was fixed in the top of this furnace, and in it was a quantity of white, molten metal, which Jack rightly took to be silver.

The pieces of plate were dropped one after another into this crucible, and almost as soon as they came into contact with the liquid they melted away.

Full an hour passed, nevertheless, before all the plate was melted, or, as Oaky called it, run down.

In this shape, of course, it was impossible for it to be recognized, and then, when there was a sufficient quantity in the crucible, it was run down into very legitimate-looking ingots, for which Jonathan easily found a ready sale, though where they were actually disposed of was perhaps known to himself alone.

These proceedings were very interesting to Jack from the fact of their utter novelty.

When the melting business was quite finished, the trio returned to where the other articles had been left.

"Make them up into a parcel, and label them as usual," said Blueskin. "My mind is easy now about the plate."

"Oh! yes."

"There will be a tremendous outcry about to-night's work," continued Blake. "It was a desperate affair. At first everything went well, but afterwards they took a turn just the other way."

"Have you been tracked at all?"

"I think not; in fact, I may say I am sure not. And we cannot be recognized by our features, for both of us wore masks."

"Then you haven't much to fear now," said Oaky, as he placed the new parcel along with the others. "Come along in-doors, and have a meal and a rest, for under the circumstances I don't think it would be altogether wise for you to go through the streets by daylight."

"Nor I, nor do I feel inclined. I have had no sleep scarcely lately, so I shall take the present opportunity of having a good one."

"That's right, captain."

"And you have had no alarm of any kind?"

"Oh! none at all, tell Mr. Wild. For my part, so long as things are done in the way they are now, I don't see how any suspicion is to be roused."

"Nevertheless, be cautious. It would be a case with us all if this place is found out."

"It would, it would."

Just as they were entering the back door of the public-house, Jack caught hold of Blueskin by the arm.

"The girl at the 'Black Lion,' the shroudmaker that I rescued. I must see her."

CHAPTER XXXI.

STEGGS GIVES "HIS LORDSHIP" A PIECE OF ADVICE WHICH IS IMMEDIATELY ACTED UPON.

THE blow which Jack Sheppard had given his rascally lordship was a very effective one apparently, for not all the united exertions of the watch could restore him to his senses.

But not so with Steggs, although one would have thought he had had most knocking about.

Perhaps he was used to hard knocks.

However, be it how it may, as soon as "his lordship" was lifted off his body, he sat up and rubbed the back of his head with a rueful air.

"A coach," he gasped, "a coach for myself and his lordship. Five shillings for anyone who will fetch a coach."

The offer of this reward, coupled with the fact that a lord was in distress, stimulated several to run off in various directions.

In less than five minutes they heard the rattling of

wheels, and one of those crazy old vehicles, the predecessors of our modern cab, drew up at the corner.

By this time Steggs had managed to regain his feet, and by his instructions "his lordship" was picked up and put inside the hackney coach.

When this was done, and his employer comfortably disposed upon the seat, Steggs himself entered, having first acted up to his word, and given the man who had fetched the conveyance the five shillings he had offered him.

The coach drove off in the direction of Holborn, for Steggs had instructed the driver to take them to the public-house in Middle-row, and then the crowd which had assembled, after spending some time in fruitless speculation, dispersed.

The little distance between these two places was soon accomplished.

Still insensible, "his lordship" was carried in by the driver and Steggs, who though a good deal hurt, was not seriously so.

The landlord recognized his guests again instantly. "Get ready your best bed-room immediately," said Steggs, "and send for a doctor. This gentleman and myself have been set upon and almost murdered by a gang of thieves."

"Yes, sir. The room is ready," said the landlord. "This way, if you please. Straight upstairs, sir."

"Do you help to carry him," said Steggs. "I am almost as much hurt as he is. And I feel that to take him up stairs would be beyond my powers."

"Willingly, sir," replied the landlord.

Steggs now carrying in his right hand a candle, led the way up the staircase, and on reaching the top by the landlord's directions opened a door immediately opposite to him.

It led into a neatly-furnished chamber, and "his lordship" was laid as carefully as they could upon the bed.

Then turning towards the driver of the coach and putting half-a-guinea into his hand, Steggs said—

"Drive to the nearest surgeon's and bring him here at once."

"All right, sir," said Jarvey. "There's Doctor Taylor as lives just round the corner of Gray's-inn-lane. Will he do?"

"Yes—yes. Bring him at once."

The hackney coachman, who for once in a way was satisfied with his fare, seeing that it was about four times as much as was legally his due, obeyed with willing alacrity.

During his absence Steggs busied himself in looking after his own hurts a little, but he found that beyond a few rather severe bruises he was all right.

He cleansed the dirt from his face, hands, and apparel, and then performed the same office for his employer.

He had scarcely finished when the landlord, accompanied by a tall pale young man entered the room.

"Doctor Taylor," said the former; and then the young man, without uttering a word, gravely took off his hat and walked to the bedside.

The administration of some volatile stimulant caused the nobleman to open his eyes and groan.

The first object upon which his gaze rested was his accomplice Steggs, and that seemed to give him the clue to all that had passed.

He had, however, sufficient presence of mind not to make any remark.

His lordship's face was terribly damaged by the blows Jack had given it, but when the doctor had carefully sponged it with warm water there did not seem to be much the matter.

"Our enterprize failed, Steggs," said his lordship, as soon as the doctor and the landlord had retired. "How was it? What fiend mauled me in this way?"

"That, your lordship, is I regret to say more than I can tell you. The attack was so sudden and unexpected that I could not see by whom it was perpetrated."

"But I did, Steggs. I did."

"Who was it, my lord?"

"A boy! A stripling that looked as if he could be knocked down with a reed. It was the same who was sitting in the room down stairs when you entered."

"Indeed," said Steggs, in a tone of voice that boded no good feeling towards Jack. "I am glad I know who it

is, I shall be able to pay him off and punish him for his interference."

"Ha! Steggs," cried his lordship, struck by a new thought. "His interference? Why should he interfere?"

"I know not, unless"—

"Unless what?"

"Unless he managed somehow to overhear our conversation."

"He must have done so! Perhaps he knows all—has already told the girl? Oh! Steggs! I am ruined—lost!"

"Not so, my lord! not so! You are in danger—imminent danger of having all discovered, but if we are prompt, we may yet be in time to carry out our purpose. If you will remember, my lord, I have been especially careful not to mention you by name, so that, in all probability, the meddling young fool is in ignorance of it!"

"We will hope so, at any rate!" replied his lordship, much relieved, "and yet he may have recognised me? Who knows? I don't think he did though, now I come to think."

"Have you any reason for holding that opinion?"

"Only this, Steggs, he looked very curiously at me when he entered, and regarded me as though I was an utter stranger."

"Why, then all is well. The information he has already acquired will avail him but little, even supposing he listened to the whole of our interview, which I think is scarcely possible."

"But what are we to do, Steggs?"

"Do, my lord?"

"Yes, do."

"Only one thing I conceive, and that"—

"Go on."

"That, my lord, I am afraid we shall find rather difficult."

"It is to obtain possession of the girl."

"Precisely."

"But how are we to do it? Where is she?"

"That, my lord, is the difficulty of which I spoke. Of course I have no more clue to her whereabouts than you have!"

His lordship sprang up in bed.

"We must find her, Steggs, we must find her, if we search every house there is in London. Or that which I have so sinned for to obtain will, after all, elude my grasp, and"—

"Do not look upon it in that light, my lord. Instead of despairing, let us hope! As yet, a short time only has elapsed. Let us commence our operations without delay."

"That is good advice, Steggs! good advice! Curse the villain, he has made me so stiff and sore that I can hardly move!"

"And I, my lord! I have said nothing about my hurts, but they are both serious and painful."

"Never mind—never mind! I can find you a plaster for every one of them."

"You are very good, my lord."

"Only get those two persons into my power, and then you may name your own reward!"

The eyes of the villain Steggs glistened with cupidity, as he heard these words.

"It is good as done, my lord! Two persons, did you say?"

"Yes!"

"The girl?"

"She is one, the other is the fiend that balked me in my designs, and battered my body!"

"Do not fear for him, my lord. I have a personal feeling in that matter."

"So much the better! I will make him live to remember and regret the day he took it into his head to interfere with me! Curse him! I ache from head to foot!"

"Rest satisfied, my lord," said Steggs, "you shall have such a revenge upon him as shall fully satisfy you. It galls me to the soul to think an urchin like that should have overcome the pair of us!"

"He took us by surprise, and that is half the victory."

"True; but his muscles must be like steel. His blows came down like hammers."

"I wonder how long it will be before I can get out."

Steggs?" asked his lordship, after a brief interval of silence. "I don't like the idea of being here idle."

"That depends upon yourself. I think if you will try to sleep till morning you will then, by an effort of your will, be able to get up and go about as usual."

"I will do so—I will do so!"

"Believe me, it will be the best."

"And you, Steggs?"

"I, my lord, must find some place where I can repose my limbs a little. I am more used to hard knocks than you, and don't feel them so much, but I think, of the two, I came decidedly the worst off in the encounter."

For once, we must coincide with Mr. Steggs.

"Well—well, be it so. I know, by myself, that you must want rest. But let us be stirring in the morning early."

"Do not fear for that."

"Good night, Steggs. The landlord will find you another room."

"Thank you, my lord, and now, if you would allow me to give you a piece of advice, in the shape of a suggestion."

"Speak out! What is it?"

"We shall have, you may be sure, the greatest possible difficulty in finding out the retreat of the two persons of whom we are in quest, if we have nothing to guide us. Now, my lord, there is a man in London who, in consideration of a sum of money, will place these persons in our hands in less than twelve hours."

"Impossible."

"It is true, nevertheless."

"And who is this man, Steggs? What is his name?"

"JONATHAN WILD!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH HIS LORDSHIP COMES TO A PERFECT UNDERSTANDING WITH THE GREAT THIEF-TAKER.

"JONATHAN WILD," repeated his lordship, "surely, Steggs, I have heard that name?"

"Most likely, I should think. He has been making himself rather notorious lately."

"But he is a thief-taker, is he not?"

"That is one portion of his avocation, but he by no means confines himself to that."

"I have heard but little about him, Steggs, and that little was by no means to his credit. I was told he always managed to wreak ill on all those who became in any way connected with him."

"Pho! pho! my lord, place no credence in that. It is the misfortune of all great and successful men to have base detractors."

"It is. And so, Steggs, you would advise that we obtained Wild's co-operation in this affair?"

"Most certainly, my lord."

"Well, well, you ought to know best. But leave me now. I will think of it—I will think of it."

"Do so."

"We cannot see him before the morning, so there is plenty of time to decide."

"There is. I will, then, with your lordship's permission, seek an hour or two's rest."

"Call me at eight, Steggs. I will get up then, come what will."

"Very good, my lord," said Steggs, obsequiously, as he closed the door. "Good-night, my lord."

"Good-night."

"It will go hard but I make something out of this affair," muttered Steggs, as he sought the landlord, "very hard, indeed. I, too, will reflect, for, after all, it may not be politic to take Jonathan into our confidence. He is a villain, but that's nothing. He would not scruple to betray anyone, and that is a great deal. I must think—I must think."

But Mr. Steggs made one little mistake, he should have thought before he broached the suggestion; for in the morning, when, according to instructions, he awakened his lordship, that gentleman very decisively expressed his determination to act upon the advice given him.

Now Steggs had come to the conclusion that he had not taken the wisest step for his own interests, but it was too late to draw back, or, if he had made an attempt even, it would have at once excited surprise, if not suspicion,

for upon every other occasion he had always made a point of instantly acquiescing with his employer's opinions.

"You must take me to Jonathan Wild's at once," he said, as soon as he had partaken of a hasty breakfast. "Is it far from here?"

"Quite close at hand, your lordship; but your face!"

"Oh! never mind that. I will call at the first chymists we come to, and get him to dress it for me. Such a triviality as that must not have power to keep me back when anything so important as the capture of this girl is going forward. Are you ready?"

"I am always ready," said Steggs, bowing low, "and willing, too, whenever your lordship requires me."

A smile of contempt came to his lordship's lips, but when Steggs raised himself to an upright position it had disappeared.

"Let us start, then, immediately," he said, "the less time there is wasted now the better."

Accordingly, in about two minutes afterwards, this precious pair were on their way to Little Newgate, whither we will precede them.

For once in a way, Jonathan came down to his office nearly an hour before his usual time that morning. The fact is, he expected to do more than an ordinary day's work.

He was anxious, too, to learn what had ensued upon the discovery of the sacrilege at Tottenham Church.

In these days of rapacious penny-a-liners, we should have had several columns in print about it at breakfast-time, but then the newspaper press was quite another affair.

No, Wild did not look for any printed intelligence of the affair, but he fully expected that he would be immediately communicated with.

The blood-stained tiara was still in Jonathan's pocket, and in the one on the other side of his coat was Lady Ingestrie's diamond necklace.

This little affair he fully expected to bring to a termination this morning, so that, with two such important pieces of business upon his mind, it is no wonder that Wild seated himself at his desk much earlier than was his wont.

Then, again, there was the affair between him and Sir Marmaduke.

He was uneasy, too, about the non-arrival of Joe Blake. It was something very out of the way for him to fail in an expedition, but as he did not come, Jonathan began to dread the worst.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Jonathan assumed a favourite attitude.

He placed his elbows on the desk, and holding the palms of his hands together, rested his chin in them.

"Let me see," he said, "I ought to expect Lord Ingestrie here first. Now shall I restore him his necklace, or put him off for a day or two longer? Which will be safest, I wonder? I must be guided by circumstances."

As he spoke he dived his hand into his pocket, and drew the necklace forth.

"A very pretty little ornament, that's certain. Rather old-fashioned, though. I should not care to give three thousand pounds for it myself, though he must if he wants it back."

At this moment some one tapped gently at the office door.

"Talk of the —," said Wild, as he lifted up the lid of his desk, and slipped the necklace into it. "Come in!" he shouted in his most ferocious tones.

It was Tonks who had tapped at the door, and just projecting his nose into the apartment, he said—

"If you please, Mr. Wild, there's two gentlemen as want to see you on particular and private business."

"Where, villain?"

"They are in the hall, if you please, sir."

"Then bring them in at once, and be hanged to you! How dare you keep them waiting?"

Tonks disappeared, and in another moment returned, ushering in that individual who as yet we know by no other name than "his lordship," and his companion in evil, Steggs.

Jonathan was rather disappointed when his eye fell upon his visitors, for he fully expected it would be Lord Ingestrie.

Tonks lost no time in closing the door, and leaving his imperious master and his visitors alone.

With a horrible contortion of the facial muscles, which on Jonathan's countenance did duty for a smile, he spoke—"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "In what way can I be of service to you?"

For a moment this question was unanswered.

His lordship felt rather embarrassed. He scarcely knew how to approach the subject.

Steggs was silent. Without instructions from his employer he, of course, could not venture to say anything.

At length his lordship spoke.

"Mr. Wild," he said.

Jonathan made a bow and a grimace, which said as plainly as though his lips had articulated the words—

"Yes, that is me. What do you want?"

At any rate, his lordship so interpreted it, for he went on—

"The business upon which I have come to obtain your co-operation, is secret and important. Can I confide in you?"

"You can, my lord."

"How?" exclaimed his lordship, and evidently, by the tone in which he spoke, more surprised and chagrined than he was delighted, "do you know me?"

"Perfectly well," said Jonathan. "You are Lord——"

"There—there! that will do!" said his lordship, hastily interrupting him, "there is no occasion for mentioning my name."

"As you please, my lord. But you asked me a rather unusual question, that is, whether you could confide in me?"

"Exactly."

"Well, then, to save time, I will simply assert that you can confide in me freely, and without fear. Indeed, if you would allow me to advise——"

Jonathan broke off suddenly. He wanted to feel his way.

"What is your advice, Mr. Wild?"

"Simply this. When you do confide in me, do so without reserve. Keep nothing back. The importance of the pursuance of this policy with either your doctor or your lawyer is well known. It is more important still that you should pursue that policy with me."

"Well—well; perhaps so. Listen to me, Mr. Wild, if you please. I daresay you will find what I want you to do an easy enough matter."

"I am listening with the greatest attention, my lord," said Wild, as he took up a pen and a sheet of paper, for he always made notes of what was said to him, though, as he did this in cipher, they were legible to no one but himself.

"You must know, in the first place, that a few days ago a young girl, of whom I wished to get possession, resided in Charles-street, Drury-lane, and obtained a livelihood by working for a Mrs. Roblet, of No. 16, Princes-street, Lincoln's-inn-fields, whose occupation is that of a shroudmaker."

"Just so, your lordship, I quite understand so far. Pray go on."

"Having resolved to carry her off, I sent my confidential servant, Steggs, here, to make inquiries respecting the time she left her place of work, and so on, in order that we might concert measures for the execution of our design."

Wild nodded.

"We arranged that Steggs should meet me at a public-house in Middle-row, Holborn, and accordingly, about half-an-hour before the appointed time, I repaired thither, and sat down in the public room to wait his arrival."

"Scarcely had I seated myself, than there entered a boy, I was going to say, for such anyone would take him to be at first sight, though I should think his age must have been about twenty or twenty-one."

"I suppose," said Wild, "that this all bears upon the case?"

"Oh! certainly. Well, I waited in the room some time, and this lad sat there also near the fire. At last Steggs came, and he began to tell me the result of his errand when I stopped him, for I perceived this lad was trying his best to listen to what we had to say, and this, of course, I wished to keep a secret."

"Perceiving this, I say, I asked for a private room, and was shown to one on the first floor. We had our con-

ference there, and, secure of not being overheard, talked freely of the matter."

"The end of it was that we resolved to carry the girl off that very night, for Steggs had ascertained that she always left her work at a little after nine o'clock."

"We chose the corner of Gate-street and Great Queen-street for the place to lay in ambush, and accordingly made our way there at once."

"A hackney coach was hired, and by Steggs' instructions drawn up in the square, while we stood near those iron railings at the corner of the street which I daresay you have noticed."

"I know the spot perfectly well, my lord, and I must say that scarcely a better for your purpose could be found in all London."

"The information which Steggs had obtained turned out to be perfectly correct, for just after the clock in the Old Square, Lincoln's-inn, had struck the hour of nine we heard a light footstep rapidly approaching us, and then as she passed under a lamp I saw her features. It was the girl I sought!"

"Yes—yes."

"We sprang forward, and made her a prisoner so suddenly that she scarce knew what had happened. I was felicitating myself upon the success which had so far crowned our expedition as we bore her rapidly towards the hackney coach, when we were taken aback by a horrible yell, and then were assailed with the greatest fury by someone."

"Steggs was the first to fall."

"Then this unknown assailant grappled with me, and to defend myself I had to let go my hold of the young girl."

"To be brief, I was worsted by this fellow, for his strength seemed something supernatural, and I carry now the marks of his blows. However, before I lost all consciousness, I saw and recognized him. It was the lad who looked so curiously at me while at the public-house."

"Indeed."

"Yes. He must have managed in some way to overhear our conversation, and so thwarted my plans. Now the girl I must have at any risk, and that at once. The lad as well must be found, and then I will settle accounts with him."

His lordship then proceeded with the aid of Steggs to give a minute description of the shroudmaker.

Afterwards of the lad.

So correct was this latter one, that when he had written it Jonathan muttered—

"Jack Sheppard by all that's damnable!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND JONATHAN WILD HAVE A SLIGHT DISAGREEMENT.

IN a moment now Jonathan Wild connected Sheppard's non-appearance, and, being mixed up in this affair together, made one event account for the other.

The reader will not fail to have perceived that, though his lordship had given Wild what appeared to be a very circumstantial and candid account, yet it was not a correct one, since he had made no mention of the relationship which existed between himself and the young girl.

It is not surprising that he should have hesitated or altogether shrunk from putting Jonathan in possession of so tremendous a secret; and therefore he led the great thief-taker to suppose that his motive for abducting the young girl was because he had taken a fancy to her.

Jonathan was used to affairs of that sort, so he at once took it for granted that that was what his lordship wanted with the young girl.

"And this took place last night, you say?"

His lordship nodded.

"London is a large place, but I think I may give you the assurance that in a day or so the girl will be in your hands, and the lad as well. But there is one little point which has not yet been taken into consideration."

"What is that, Mr. Wild?"

"Why, you see, it will not be possible for me to prosecute these inquiries for your lordship without expending money."

"Of course not. Now, Mr. Wild, what value do you set upon this service?"



[JONATHAN WILD IS CHASED BY THE THAMES POLICE.]

"Well, I can hardly say. It depends upon many circumstances. I should think about five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds, Mr. Wild. That is a very large sum of money."

"I am well aware of it, my lord. But I suppose you want this girl."

"I must have her," he replied, vehemently; "let the cost be what it will."

"Very good. Then my demand is ridiculously small. However, as I have said it, I won't run back from my word. Write me out your promise to pay me five hundred pounds upon the consummation of the affair, and I guarantee to place the girl in your hands in less than forty-eight hours."

His lordship hesitated a moment, when Wild gave him the pen, but upon second thoughts he wrote it, and Jonathan carefully folded it up and put it into a compartment of his pocket-book.

A grim smile came over the thief-taker's face. He imagined the five hundred pounds as good as earned, for,

of course he made sur that Jack would not hesitate to tell him where the girl was to be found.

But in this he reckoned without his host

"It's as good as done, my lord," he said. "You need trouble your mind no more about it. It's a pity you did not come to me in the first instance; but, however, it does not signify further than that by this time your lordship would have achieved the object of your desires."

"I shall leave you then with that assurance. Only perform your promise, and I shall not be particular to a few pounds extra. Good morning, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan banged his cudgel on the desk.

Tonks appeared in answer to the summons.

"Show these gentlemen to the door, villain."

"Yes, Mr. Wild. Oh! yes, sir. This way, gentlemen if you please."

As the office-door closed after his visitors, Jonathan assumed his former attitude.

"Let me think," he said; "let me think. 'There is more in this affair than meets the eye, I feel convinced."

Jack Sheppard, too! By what chance is he mixed up in it? I must question him when he returns, and learn all from him, as well as where the girl is at the present moment. This will be another good day, I can see."

Tap—tap.

"More visitors," said Wild, as he twitched his wig over his eyes. "More grist to the mill. Ha! ha!"

This time it was Lord Ingestrie.

He looked pale and anxious. He had had some difficulty in raising the money Wild demanded for the restoration of the necklace.

"You don't look well, my lord," said Jonathan. "I am afraid you have been worrying yourself about the necklace. It was quite unnecessary, I can assure you."

"No, no. It is not that. It is the trouble I have had to get the money."

"Indeed."

"Yes. But I have managed it. And now, how have you succeeded?"

"Indifferently well, my lord, indifferently well. My men found out indirectly who had it, and made overtures for its return."

"And the result?"

"Well, my lord, the result is not quite as I expected. It must have got wind that your lordship set an intrinsic value upon it, for they are more extortionate than I thought they would be."

"Then never mind. It must go."

"Indeed."

"Yes. I have already had the utmost difficulty in getting together so large a sum. I am sorry I troubled you at all in the affair."

"Oh! pray don't mention that. My trouble has been nothing, as I may say, but what it has been your lordship is heartily welcome to."

"And now, just for curiosity, what does the miscreant ask for restoring the stolen article?" I mean how much money."

"Just so."

"How much is it?"

"Three thousand five hundred guineas!"

"Three thousand"—

"Five hundred."

"Why, you said at first, offer four thousand."

"I know I did, but your lordship thought that rather unreasonable, and it was afterwards settled at three."

"So it was; but I had, nevertheless, counted upon four, and that is the sum I have raised."

"Then," said Wild, who had the greatest possible difficulty in concealing his exultation, "do you feel inclined to give the amount named?"

"I certainly don't feel inclined, but still"—

"You would not like such a thing to go out of your possession?"

"I should not, Mr. Wild, and that is just it."

"Then the better way for you will be to give the money."

"And can't I bring the fellow to law?"

"Oh! impossible!"

"How so?"

"I don't know who he is."

"But your man, who has managed the business so far?"

"Has not seen the actual person, but a go-between."

"How confoundedly cautious!"

"It is necessary to be so, my lord, when you have a noose dangling over your head."

"Of course, of course."

"I told my man to offer the three thousand, but as that offer was not accepted, and five hundred more asked, I could not do anything until I had seen you."

"No, no."

"For I did not know whether you would be willing to give that amount."

"I suppose it must be so," said Lord Ingestrie, with a sigh, as he drew forth a phrethoric pocket-book, and began counting out some notes.

"Frustrations," said Wild, sympathizingly, "to have to part with so large an amount to get back one's own property, is it not?"

"You are right, it is; I feel it. I suppose, though, there is no choice in the matter."

"None at all."

"Just count those, then; I think you will find them all right."

"The are quite right," said Wild, who rapidly counted the notes, "and now about your lordship's watch?"

"Ah! where is that?"

"I have no idea; I cannot get the least trace of it. But make your mind easy about that; I will get it back for you sooner or later."

"I am glad to have such an assurance. And now, Mr. Wild, in spite of your deprecation of your trouble you must have had a good deal, and the business cannot have been managed without putting you to some expense. Now what is your charge for all this?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing!" repeated Wild, emphatically.

"But did I not understand you to say that the three thousand five hundred pounds was the exact amount you would have to give?"

"Such is the case."

"Then how are you to be paid?"

"Oh! I have my salary as a chief police-officer."

"I am aware of that, but it is always usual for something extra to be charged."

"I know that, but my sole desire is to serve your lordship. I very much regret you should have to pay anything at all, and I could not think of taking anything from you myself."

"Tut, tut!" said Lord Ingestrie, who was completely deceived by Wild's apparent magnanimity. "Tut, tut! I can't allow you to have all your trouble for nothing."

"Of course," said Wild, with a hypocritical whine, "it would be rude and ungrateful on my part were I to refuse to accept anything your lordship might be pleased to give me in recognition of my services."

"To be sure it would. Now what shall it be?"

"Oh! my lord, I could not think of naming anything for a moment. That I must leave entirely with you. You may rest assured that I shall be completely satisfied with anything that your lordship may be pleased to give me."

"But I hardly know how to estimate your services. Beyond the bare fact of knowing that you have found out the stealer of the bracelet, and arranged with him to return it for a certain sum, I know nothing. However, I shall be very glad if you will accept of this fifty pound note."

"You are too munificent," said Wild, "by far too munificent."

"Not at all. I would a thousand times rather give any amount of money away than I would have it extorted from me."

"And so would I, and so of course would everyone else."

"That, then, is settled. And now, Mr. Wild, how about the necklace?"

"Well, you can either meet the person who is to give it up, or you can come here for it, whichever you like best. I should prefer the former."

"Why, Mr. Wild?"

"Oh! for no very particular reason, except that you would see that I had represented things to you just as they actually are."

"I do not doubt you for a moment, and if you will allow me I will in preference call here for the necklace."

"As you like, my lord."

"You can meet this intermediate party and get it back. To tell you the truth, I have no desire to face them."

"Perhaps it is best not. They are always on the look out for treachery."

"I suppose so, and therefore I will call here, and receive it from you. When shall I come?"

"To-morrow morning at this time, if you please, my lord. I hope you will accept of my thanks for the liberal, very liberal present you have made me, and believe that I shall be always grateful."

"Say no more," said Ingestrie, as he prepared to quit Wild's office. "Your behaviour throughout the whole of this affair has been praiseworthy in the extreme."

"I am not a little delighted," said Wild, "that I should have been fortunate enough to win the good opinion of

your lordship. As for your watch I will make it a point of honour of getting it back for you."

"Thanks! You may rely upon my gratitude."

"No, my lord," said Wild, as he got off his stool and held open the door to allow his illustrious visitor to depart. "Under no circumstances will I accept of a penny for that matter. I am quite firm about that."

"Well, well! We shall see! Good day!"

"Good day, my lord. Tonks, show his lordship to the door."

Jonathan waited until he heard the front door bang, and then he ventured to give utterance to his thoughts.

"So far, very good," he said. "Very good, indeed. What an infernal fool he must be. Oh! but the magnanimous dodge is the dodge of all dodges. Ha! ha! Three thousand five hundred and fifty pounds. A capital morning's work indeed. Now I only want to be equally lucky with" —

But before Jonathan could finish his sentence another visitor was announced; but before we relate who it was, and what took place at the interview, we must turn our attention to some of our characters whom we have for some time neglected.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DIAMOND TIARA IS THE MEANS OF GETTING JONATHAN INTO TROUBLE.

Not until darkness had fairly settled upon the earth would Blueskin move from the "Ship and Rainbow" public-house, although Jack importuned him to do so.

But he turned a deaf ear to all he said, nor would he on any account suffer Jack to go away alone.

In accordance with the resolution he had expressed he sought a bed-chamber, and having, after some trouble, got a promise from Jack that he would not take advantage of his slumber to steal away he composed himself to sleep.

Jack, to tell the truth, was glad enough to follow his example, for he sadly needed rest.

And so at night, as we have said, they awoke refreshed, and having eaten a hearty meal departed.

Had anyone been on the watch they would have seen nothing remarkable in the fact of two persons putting up all day at the inn, and going away as they came, but as it happened no one noticed either their arrival or departure.

The horse was quite fresh after his day's rest in the stable, and he carried them along at a pace few others could have equalled.

Blueskin drove straight to the livery stables at the corner of King-street, Long-acre, and alighting there, went in the direction of the "Black Lion" on foot.

Those who are acquainted with the locality will be aware that it is not more than six or eight minutes walk to the ancient inn, for the building itself is still in existence, although the sign has been changed.

Now it is called the "Cock and Magpie."

Had Blueskin entirely consulted his own inclination he would have made his way direct to Newgate-street, but he had promised Jack he should call at the "Black Lion."

When they arrived the place was rather empty. It was almost too early in the evening for their customers to arrive.

The pair walked straight into the kitchen at the back of the house, and there they found Johnson very composedly smoking a pipe.

He rose as he saw his visitors enter, and hastened to bring two chairs towards the fire for their accommodation.

"How is —" Jack began, and he suddenly stopped. He did not know the name of the girl to whom he had been of such essential service.

But Johnson seemed to understand perfectly well who he meant, for he said —

"She is all right, and looks so different that you would hardly know her. I expect her every moment. She was here just now, but she went out about two minutes ago along of the missus."

"Let us have something to drink, Johnson, and bring a glass for yourself," said Blueskin. "I suppose there is no news?"

"Nothing as concerns you. I've been rather uneasy

all day, for you know you told me to expect you about four o'clock this morning."

"I know I did, but I got to Oakley about that time, and there I have been ever since."

"I felt pretty sure you were safe, for I know you are quite able to take care of yourself."

Johnson soon had the brandy on the table, and all three took a tolerable quantity, Jack the least, for he was in a perfect fever to see his protégée.

After waiting what appeared to him to be an endless time, though it certainly was not more than a quarter-of-an-hour, the rustling of female garments reached his ears, and then Mrs. Johnson entered, closely followed by the young girl.

Jack fairly uttered a shout of astonishment and delight when he beheld her. He had already seen sufficient of her countenance to know that it was a more beautiful one than it falls to the lot of most feminine humanity to have, but he was hardly prepared to see her looking so lovely as she did.

The cry he had uttered had the effect of instantly drawing the girl's attention to him, and as soon as she saw her preserver a glad smile rose to her lips, and with a slightly heightened colour in her cheeks and sparkle in her eyes, she held out her hand to Jack.

It was a small and beautifully-shaped hand, and such a one as many a titled dame would have given a trifle to possess.

Under the landlady's care she had quite recovered.

Her old clothes were thrown aside, and she was attired in some that belonged to one of Johnson's daughters now deceased, and which, as she was about her age and size, fitted her admirably.

With an air of charming freedom, she drew up a chair close to Jack's and sat down in it.

It is in woman's nature to feel grateful for a service rendered, and the fair shroudmaker was no exception to the rest of her sex.

Her familiar manner soon put Jack at his ease, who, it must be confessed, felt at first rather bashful and confused.

Almost the first question that he found courage to ask her was her name.

"I have two," she said; "one is Elizabeth Lyon, and the other is a nickname they gave me at Mrs. Roblet's."

"And what is that?"

"Edgworth Bess."

"Edgworth Bess!" repeated Jack, "what an extraordinary name. What in the world made them call you that?"

"I can't imagine, but that is the name I have always gone by."

"And now," said Jack, "I promised to tell you what I know about you, and how I came to learn what I do know."

"You did. Tell me now, do."

"I will. You must know, in the first place, that last night, having some time to while away, I went into a public-house in Middle-row, Holborn."

"Yes."

"As soon as I entered the public room my attention was immediately attracted by a man who was sitting at a table near the window. He was burly and middle-aged, with a countenance at once cunning and forbidding."

"And was that one of the men who attacked me?"

"Patience, and you shall hear. Now, when I looked at this individual I saw that, although he was dressed with great plainness, yet everything he had on was of the best material, while, lying on the table before him, was a richly-jewelled sword, from which I concluded he was something more than he appeared to be; and I was confirmed in this supposition by seeing him presently draw from beneath his coloured waistcoat a very valuable gold watch, which he put back with an impatient air, as though he was waiting for some one who had appointed to meet him there, but who was behind his time."

"This second supposition of mine turned out to be quite correct, for a little while afterwards a man came in, and then both began to converse together in a low tone."

"Go on, go on!" said Edgworth Bess, for by this name we shall in future call her. "I am impatient to hear the rest."

"I tried my utmost to hear what they said, but to my mortification, I could not make out a syllable. I observed,

however, that they glanced suspiciously towards me, and then the one who was there when I went in called for the landlord, and asked for a private room, who showed them into one on the first floor, and just over the one in which they had been sitting.

"I don't know how it was, but I felt uncommonly curious to know what they had got to say to each other, though, of course, it was no business of mine. Nevertheless, so strong did this desire become, that I determined, let the risk be what it might, to try and overhear their conversation."

"What a courage you must have," said Bess "I should have been frightened to death."

"Oh! that was nothing," said Jack, with a satisfied smile, for every one likes to be thought brave. "I finished my glass, and then went to the door of the room and peeped into the passage."

"No one was there, and just before me I saw the stairs."

"I sprang across the hall and up the stairs like lightning, and after being nearly found out got into a room that was only separated from the one where the two mysterious visitors were sitting by a wooden partition."

"And so you could hear every word they said?"

"I could with the greatest ease and distinctness, and then I found that the one who had come in last addressed the other as my lord."

"My lord! He was a nobleman then?"

"It appears like it; however, let me go on with my story. You can make your remarks about it afterwards."

Full of wonder and interest Bess listened.

"His lordship called this man by the very funny name of Steggs, and, from what I heard, it appears that this Steggs had been sent to ascertain whether some information, which had been given to his lordship, was correct."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, that information was, whether a girl who lived in Charles-street, Drury-lane, worked for a woman named Roblet, a shroud-maker, of No. 16, Princes-street, Lincoln's Inn-fields."

"Why, that is me!"

"So it turns out. Well, I found that this lordship, for his name was never mentioned, though I think my friend here who is talking to Johnson knows it,—I found that this lordship had had an elder brother who had inherited a great deal of property from his father, but who was now dead, and that this elder brother had a daughter to whom the estates would revert by law."

"I understand that."

"So much the better then, for you will be able to comprehend that if this girl was not in existence the younger brother would inherit the estates, but while she lived he could not do so."

"Certainly not."

"To a wicked and unscrupulous man the thought of destroying or in some way getting rid of this child who stood between him and wealth would, of course, occur, and so this younger brother employed a man to make away with the little heiress."

"How dreadful!"

"But this man, like many another before him, found it impossible to murder an innocent and beautiful child, so he gave it instead to some poor people who lived in Charles-street, Drury-lane."

"Then—then—"

"Stop and hear the end. Williams,—for that was the man's name who was to have done the horrid deed,—finding himself drawing near to an end, sent for a comrade of his named Steggs, and disclosed the whole affair to him, and died entreating him to see the heiress restored to those rights from which she was so unjustly deprived. But this Steggs, it seemed, thought he should reap the most profit by siding with this younger brother, and so told him the whole affair. It then became necessary to ascertain whether the story told by the man Williams was correct, and, if so, to concert measures for putting it out of the power of the heiress to succeed to that property bequeathed to her by her father."

CHAPTER XXXV.

JONATHAN WILD FINDS IT NECESSARY TO READ JACK SHEPPARD A LESSON.

"AND so," interrupted Edgworth Bess, "that is the reason why those two men attempted to carry me away."

"That is the reason."

"And you, as soon as you heard this plot, without thinking what peril you might encounter, resolved to frustrate it?"

"I did, and, as you see, succeeded."

"Oh, it was noble of you, indeed it was," she said, with tears of gratitude and admiration thronging in her eyes. "I shall never be able to recompense you for what you have done."

"Tush! I have done nothing yet to what I mean to do. Johnson here will find you in a home for a little while, and during that time I will ascertain the name of this lord and all particulars, and I will never rest until I have succeeded in restoring you to your rights."

"And then when you have I shall be able to repay you. That is," she added, "if you will think what I offer you repayment."

"I should be better pleased," said Jack, "if you would say nothing about repayment. Believe me, I shall never accept of anything."

"Do not be offended with me, but I do not like to be under an obligation to anyone. I suppose it is because I have an independent spirit. But it was not money I was going to offer you."

"What then?" asked Jack, a wild hope springing up in his breast, "what then?"

"Since you will accept of nothing I will not tell you. It would be useless to tell you."

"No, no. Tell me, do tell me, what you are going to offer me."

Bess was silent, and then timidly placed her hand upon Jack's.

"Yourself?" he asked, while he pressed it between his own rough palms, "impossible!"

But even as he said the word he saw upon the face of the young girl an expression which told him it was true.

Under the excitement of the moment there is no saying of what extravagance he might not have been guilty had not the voice of Blueskin at that moment recalled him to himself.

"Now then, Jack, you have said quite enough, I'm sure. Come along. We must see Jonathan to-night."

Jack rose, and once more pressing the hand of Edgworth Bess, he said—

"To-morrow I will be here, and I hope with some information that will be worth communicating."

A glance was the only reply Jack had to this speech, but it was so full of meaning that it made his heart bound in his bosom and his veins throb with an unknown delight.

The young girl loved him.

Those who have studied human nature know how easily gratitude merges into affection, and so it was with this young girl.

As for Jack, he loved her even before he saw her.

As he followed his comrade out into the open street, all things seemed to him to wear a new aspect and appear more pleasing than they did, but the change was in his own breast.

The criminal transactions in which he had participated faded utterly from his mind. One feeling, one thought alone occupied him, and that was love.

All the way to Newgate-street he was buried in a reverie, and spoke not a word.

Probably enough Blueskin formed a shrewd guess as to the cause of his abstraction, but if he did he made no remark about it.

With his pass-key Blueskin opened the door of Wild's house.

A dim light burned in the passage.

By its aid he saw a man seated in the chair near the door.

He slept.

The horrible snoring that he made placed that beyond a doubt.

Blueskin shook him roughly.

The man awoke.

He glared about him in bewildered surprise.

"Thank your stars," said Blueskin, "that I found you sleeping at your post, and not Jonathan. Where is he?"

"Upstairs in his room," he said. "Confound it, I could only have just dropped off."

Without waiting to listen to the excuses of this man, Blueskin, with Sheppard at his heels, crossed the passage and ascended the stairs.

He paused at the same door that he had stopped at upon a former occasion.

He tapped gently.

Then listened for some sound from within.

A growling snarl reached their ears, and Blake opened the door and entered.

Just in the same position by the fireside as when Jack was first introduced to him sat the redoubtable thief-taker.

"Back safe again, Blue, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"And young Sheppard?"

"Yes, here he is."

"Ha! Success?"

"Only partial."

"How's that, Blue, eh?"

The reader will perceive Jonathan treated his lieutenant with greater civility than he did his myrmidons.

"We had a desperate job, and got the plate all right; but, although I searched the iron box beneath the bed thoroughly, not a trace of the paper you want could I find."

Whatever paper this was, or whatever it might contain, it was evidently very important to Wild, and he was much disturbed at not obtaining it, if one may judge by the manner in which he sprung to his feet and walked up and down the room.

"We must not give it up, Blue. The paper is in existence, I am confident of that."

"It is not in his strong box."

"Be it where it will, I must have it. Did you carry off all the plate?"

"All."

"Then the expedition has not been altogether profitless. But we will speak further of this in the morning. In the meantime, be off, I want to have a little private conversation with friend John here. Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JONATHAN WILD PROVES TOO MANY FOR JACK SHEPPARD.

WHICH of the two, Blueskin or Jack Sheppard, was most astonished at hearing these words from Jonathan Wild it would be hard to say, and why he should finish with that short, disagreeable, spasmodic kind of laugh, they were at a loss to imagine.

However, Blueskin took the hint to go.

As soon as he had left the room Jonathan's manner underwent a considerable change.

He thought that on the present occasion it would be his best policy to be civil with Jack.

It was a great effort for him to be civil to anybody.

"Draw your chair closer up to the fire, Jack," he said, "and pour yourself out a glass. I want to have a little talk with you. Should you like a pipe?"

"No, thank you," said Jack, more and more amazed at the thief-taker's condescension. "I never smoke."

"Don't you, indeed? Well, fill up a glass."

Jack did so, and then just putting it to his lips he replaced it on the table, for he was all impatience to hear what Jonathan had to say.

Wild took about half-a-dozen whiffs at his pipe before he spoke.

"Jack," he then said, "I have formed the highest opinion of you, my boy; I think we shall get on very well together."

He paused, evidently expecting a reply, but Jack was quite at a loss how to answer him, so he merely nodded his head.

"There is only this. You must work with me; as soon as ever you set yourself up in opposition, down you go."

"Oh!"

"It's true, my own safety requires it, and when that is the case I never scruple much about what I do. Many and many a promising youth has come to grief by that very thing."

"Setting themselves up in opposition to you, Mr. Wild?"

"Exactly. Now I hope, Jack, for I have taken the greatest fancy to you, that you will never do anything so foolish, because if you were, in spite of my regard, you would share the same fate."

"And that fate?"

"Is a hempen collar at Tyburn."

Jack fidgetted about in his chair.

The conversation was taking a disagreeable turn, and he began to ask himself whether Jonathan knew anything of his proceedings with his lordship and the shroud-maker, and whether he would call that setting himself up in opposition.

Wild's next words confirmed his worst fears.

"Now, Jack, you went last night, or rather, to speak more correctly, the night before last, along with Blueskin to crack a crib at Kilburn, and you've got back safe. Now what I want more particularly to know is how you and where you passed the time after you left here, and meeting with Blueskin at the 'Black Lion'?"

"Oh! no how. Just waiting about, that's all."

"Just waiting about. Oh! indeed, Jack! Now, for your own good, I'd advise you to be careful what you say, and candid, too, or it may be the worse for you."

He did not know how it was exactly, but somehow, Jack felt the greatest repugnance to tell Wild anything about the fair shroud-maker. He could not help fancying that he saw in Jonathan one of those who would keep her from her rights.

He wished for an opportunity of speaking to Blueskin upon the subject, so as to be guided by him, but there was no means by which he could get to speak to him.

Jack was terribly uneasy, not on account of himself, but upon that of the young girl he had so soon learned to love.

The harsh tones of Jonathan Wild broke in upon his meditations.

"And while you were waiting about, did you go anywhere?"

"Oh! yes!" said Jack, with a great effort, "I went to several places."

"Did you? Can you tell me some of them?"

"No, not at this moment."

"Then I will refresh your memory a little, Jack, my boy; wasn't one of the places you went into a public-house in Middle-row, Holborn?"

Jack started. "How in the world," he asked himself, "could Jonathan have learned that he went in there?"

"Wasn't the public-house in Middle-row, Holborn, one of the places you waited at, eh?" asked Wild, in a louder tone of voice. "Why don't you answer me, eh?"

"I was trying to recollect."

"Ya-ah!"

"And now I call it to mind, I did go in there and wait, I think."

"You think you did?"

"Yes."

"So do I. Now when you went in, who was it that you saw sitting at the table by the window?"

"That's just what I want to know, and mean to find out," said Jack.

"Ha! ha!"

"Of course I can see plainly enough you have, by some means or other, learned all that has taken place, so it's nonsense for me to attempt to deny it."

"Bravo, Jack! Now look here."

Jonathan produced his greasy leathern pocket-book, and took from it a bank-note, which he handed to Jack.

"That's for yourself, my boy! Put it into your pocket."

"No," said Jack, "before I do that I should like to know what I am to do in return for having it."

Jonathan shut one eye, a favourite action of his when he saw people appear to be cunning.

"You are a clever chap, Jack, a very shrewd, clever chap. You are quite correct in supposing that I want you to do something for which that note will be payment."

"Then, if that's the case," said Sheppard, as he tossed the piece of paper across the table, "you had better not pay me until I have done it. Pay beforehand is the worst pay of all."

Jonathan scowled; but for all that, he forced one of those short laughs of his from his lips.

"Sharp youth! Well, now, to go back again, you overheard at this public-house a plot, between two persons, to abduct a young girl."

"Yes, I did, and I don't deny it, but they didn't succeed quite so well as they thought they would."

"I know they didn't. And now, Jack, do you know this man's motive for wanting the girl carried off?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then that's all right," said Wild, who added immediately, "I wish I did."

"Well?"

"Knowing this, Jack, you must, of course, be aware that he has resolved to have her, and have her he will."

"I don't know about that," said Jack, sullenly.

"Don't you, indeed?"

"I can see pretty well how it is."

"Can you really?"

"Yes I can."

"Then, my clever young friend, just be good enough to say how it is."

"Why, when Steggs and his lordship failed in their enterprise, they came direct to you, fancying that you would be easiest able to find out where the young girl now is."

"Wonderful! That is precisely it. Now, Jack, a great deal will depend upon this."

"Upon what?"

"Do you know his lordship's real motive for wishing to get possession of this girl?"

"I do."

"I say his real motive, not his apparent one."

"Of course."

"Now, just to try you, Jack, and more depends upon your answer than you think, tell me what you think is the real motive."

Now Jack for once made a miscalculation.

So artfully had Wild managed the whole affair that he felt sure he did know all, and, therefore, he thought there could be no harm in letting him know the extent of his information.

He spoke at once, and to the point.

"He wants to carry her off, and either murder her or put her out of the way somehow, because she being his elder brother's child is the heiress to the estates which his lordship now unjustly holds."

Jonathan's breath was quite taken away by this intelligence.

He dropped his pipe, and stared at Jack with wide open mouth and eyes.

His behaviour was so exactly that of a recipient of a piece of unexpected and astounding news, that Jack knew instantly he had been trapped into making a false move.

"Is this true, Jack?" gasped Wild.

"True!" iterated Sheppard, infuriated that Wild should have overreached him, "didn't you tell me you knew all about it when you did not, or else you would not ask me whether it was true?"

"But, Jack, his lordship told me that his motive was entirely different. Is it really possible that what you have told me is true?"

"It is something more than possible."

"Why—why, Jack! she—she"—

"What?"

"Is worth her weight in gold to anyone who can lay hold of her. Where is she, Jack?"

"And do you think, Jonathan Wild, that I would be instrumental in placing her in her rascally uncle's power? Never, never!"

"Mind, what you're about, Jack. You may just as well tell me at once, and save trouble, for I am sure to find out."

"And if I tell you where she is, whose side shall you take—her's or her uncle's?"

"Ha! ha!"

"What is there to laugh at?"

"Oh! lots. Now, which side do you think I should take?"

"I don't know."

"I'll tell you."

"Her uncle's?"

"Perhaps so! But, at any rate, the one from whom I should get the most money."

"And would not the restoration of a young girl to her own be a sufficient reward without anything else?"

"Not a bit of it. But to be candid with you, Jack. It will be best for us to row in the same boat."

"Oh! will it?"

"It will, Jack; believe me, it will."

"Well, go on."

"You're rather saucy, Jack; however, as I like you, I shall look over that."

"Oh! just as you like," said Sheppard, who felt that circumstances had placed him in a position to make free with Jonathan Wild. "Don't make me an exception to any of your rules, I beg."

Wild glared angrily at him.

"Go on with what you've got to say, but if you want me to take part against the young girl"—

"Yes—yes."

"You may save your breath, for I tell you once for all I'll see you jolly well d—d first."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD FOR ONCE IN HIS LIFE IS OUT-MANŒUVRED BY JONATHAN WILD.

JONATHAN started to his feet.

His face was inflamed with passion.

"How dare you?" he said, "I'll"—

But a second thought came across the mind of the politic thief-taker, and he, by a great effort, curbed his anger, and sat down in his seat again.

"Jack Sheppard," he said, "it is pretty evident you are a lad of spirit, and I like you; so I have put up without resenting it that which I would not have suffered from anyone else."

"I'm much obliged," said Jack.

"Now you are young and inexperienced, and have not seen so much of the world as I have, Jack. Now do for once take my advice."

"I am listening."

"Very well, then. It's natural enough that your sympathies are on the side of the heiress. My sympathies are there too."

The idea of Jonathan Wild having sympathy for anybody was rich in the extreme, and so thought Jack, if one may judge by the smile which rose to his lips.

"Ah! you may smile," said Wild, "but it's a fact for all that; but it is wrong to be carried away by your feelings, you ought to bring reason to bear upon the subject."

"It won't do, Jonathan."

"Now, there is one very important thing I should like you to take into consideration," continued Wild, unheeded by Sheppard's ejaculatory interruption; "and that is, that possession is nine points of the law."

"I know that well enough."

"Oh! you do? So much the better, then. Now, at the present time, Lord ——— What is his name, Jack?"

"That's just what I want to know."

"Oh! is it? Then I am sorry to say I can't tell you. However, as I was going to say, his lordship has possession at present, and there would be a good deal of trouble in ousting him."

"Perhaps?"

"Perhaps? I am sure of it. And then consider further, his lordship has all his life been used to the luxuries of his present mode of life, and it would be cruel in the greatest degree to deprive him of them."

"Stuff!"

"Especially to put into his place one who has never been accustomed to such things, and therefore cannot feel the want of them."

"But that is not the question, Jonathan Wild."

"Stop a little longer, and you'll see it is. An affair of this sort ought always to be made peculiarly advantageous to those concerned in it. Now, if you are only half as clever as I take you to be, you'll perceive that his lordship would give more to retain his possessions than the girl would be put into them."

Jack Sheppard rose to his feet.

"It's no good trying it on. I told you just now that I would not lift a finger to keep her from her rights, but, on the contrary, I would use my whole energies to restore her to them. As for telling you where she is, you will get no more from me, further than that she is safe, and where you will be unable to find her."

"Don't make too sure of that, viper," said Wild, as he, too, sprung from his chair, "I'll wring it from you before you are many hours older."

"Will you? I don't think you will. Good night,

Jonathan Wild. Our acquaintance has been short, but quite long enough."

"Are you going, Jack?"

"I am," he replied, going towards the door.

"No, don't, Jack, for my sake. Pray stay. Ha! ha!"

Jonathan Wild had a strange habit of laughing on the most unimirthful occasions, or at all events when no one but himself could see anything to laugh at.

Jack Sheppard put his hand on the lock of the door.

At the same moment, though he did not perceive it, Jonathan Wild pressed upon a spring, which communicated with a bell in the lower portion of his domicile.

"One minute more, Jack," he said. "Let us, if we are going to part over this matter, part friends. Fill up your glass once more. I am very sorry I am going to lose you over a booby of a girl."

Jack did not know Wild yet, or he would have known that when he spoke gently he was most to be dreaded.

He saw nothing sinister in the fact of his asking him to drink, and besides, he was blinded a little with self-conceit.

Almost, however, before he could reach the table, the door of the room was thrown open and one of Wild's men entered the room.

"Secure him!" cried the thief-taker, with sudden vehemency, "secure him!"

Jack turned round with the rapidity of lightning, but he was too late; the men had already grasped him tightly from behind.

In vain he struggled to free himself. They were used to that sort of thing, and his struggles seemed to have no other effect than that of tightening the hold they had upon him.

His rage at being thus outwitted lent him double strength, too, but it was no use.

"Curse you," he said; "you shall repent this."

"Ha! ha!"

The laugh was even shorter and more disagreeable than usual.

"To the cells with him," he cried; "drag him along, I will follow you."

In obedience to his commands the two men began to drag Jack towards the door, but this they found rather more difficult than holding him.

"Be quiet, fool," cried Wild. "Can't you see it is useless to attempt to get away. Drop it, or it will be the worse for you."

But Jack heeded not his words, he was furious at the thought that he should thus be made a prisoner.

Jonathan Wild took up his cudgel from the corner by the fire-place, where he had been resting.

He swung it round just before Jack's face, who was not so blinded with passion as not to be able to see it, and understand what was meant."

He ceased his struggles.

He thought he might just as well save his scone as not.

Down stairs and along the gloomy passage leading to the cells he was marshalled by the two men, Jonathan Wild, with a hideous grin distorting his lips, following in the rear.

Through the curious iron door, past the cell doors, to the very end of the passage, they went, as Wild had done on the occasion of his visit to Sir Marmaduke.

The secret door in the wall—a secret to all those who were not in the confidence of the great thief-taker—was opened, and they entered the gloomy corridor beyond.

The very next cell to that in which languished the unfortunate baronet, was the one destined to be the abiding-place of Jack.

The door grated back upon its hinges, and Jack was rudely thrust over the threshold.

They did not think it necessary to bind him in any way. They relied upon the strength of the dungeon itself precluding all possibility of escape.

Jack, who was unaware that the flooring of the cell was some two feet lower than that of the passage, fell heavily upon his face when he was thrust in.

Jonathan himself held the door almost shut, and through the crevice peeped into the cell.

"Ha! ha! Jack, my boy. How do you feel now? How do you like your new quarters? I tell you what it is: here you will have to stay until you choose to tell me where I know who is. You will, indeed. Ha! ha!"

To this speech Jack Sheppard deigned no other reply than a howl of rage.

Bang went the door of the cell, and then Wild set about securing it.

He first turned a key in the lock.

Then he shot two enormous iron bolts into their sockets.

And lastly put a thick oaken bar crossways over the door.

It was secure enough in all conscience one would think. Jonathan seemed to think so, for he turned from it with an air that said as plainly as possible—

"Get out of that if you can."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SIR MARMADUKE HEARS A MYSTERIOUS VOICE, WHICH ADVISES HIM NOT TO SIGN THE DEED.

"YA—AH!" cried Wild, as he turned round and faced the two men who had brought Jack to the dungeon, "Ya—ah! what are you waiting for? Be off with you, I say, be off."

Upon hearing these words the two officers vanished with a celerity that seemed really marvellous.

Before he could have counted ten Jonathan Wild was completely alone.

The silence of the very grave was around him.

"Shall I go now," he muttered, "or is it too soon after my former visit? I am here now, though, and I think it will be as well."

From these words the reader will easily comprehend that it was to the unfortunate baronet, Sir Marmaduke Osborn, that he referred, and in whose fate, it is presumed, some considerable amount of interest is felt.

As he spoke, Wild made his way to the door of the dungeon, and, withdrawing the fastenings, threw the door open.

The faint rustling sound which would be produced by anyone slowly turning over upon straw reached his ears.

"Sir Marmaduke Osborn," said Wild, "I have come."

"Begone then, villain. Begone!"

"Not until I please."

"To stay here is useless. Thank Heaven I was able to resist the temptation to barter away my estates for my liberty. Hence, I say! I will never sign the deed."

"Your's is a brave spirit."

"Mocker! May the bitterest and most withering curse of a wife—a mother—and children, cling to you now, and through all eternity! Curse you! Curse you, I say!"

Jonathan shook a little.

Superstition formed no inconsiderable element in Wild's mental composition, and he could not hear unmoved the just imprecations of the man he had so foully injured.

But he quickly recovered himself.

"Silence!" he yelled. "You had best be so, or I may adopt means of enforcing it which you will find more effective than pleasant. Silence, I say!"

Jonathan jumped down into the cell as he spoke.

He held the lamp which he carried in such a position that its rays fell with the greatest force upon the baronet.

This unfortunate object of Wild's avarice was extended at full length upon the straw.

When he spoke he had raised himself a little on one arm, but upon the approach of his arch enemy, he sunk down to a recumbent position.

The rays from Jonathan's lamp dazzled him.

"Get up," cried the thief-taker. "Get up, I say. Do you hear?"

"I do hear, and I comply," said the prisoner, as he sat up; "but I do so merely to escape your brutality, for I know you are cowardly enough to maltreat me, weak and defenceless as I am."

Wild growled out some half-articulate reply, and then he said—

"I told you yesterday I should visit you to-day, and you see, ha! ha! I am as good as my word. Quite funny that. Why don't you laugh, Sir Marmaduke? You have been expecting me, have you not?"

There was something grotesquely horrible about Wild's mocking tones.

The prisoner was silent.

Jonathan continued.

"I hope," he said, "you have come to the determina-

tion to accede to the terms which I propose. The little opportunity for reflection which I generously accorded you has been made use of, I hope."

"It has, Jonathan Wild."

"What is your resolution? To sign the deed, of course?"

"Oh! Wild! Wild! what have I done that you should persecute me thus?" Do not, oh! do not, for the sake of my wife and little ones, rob me of my all. Take a part, take a part. To secure my own freedom I would gladly give a moiety, but not all—not all!"

The piteous tones in which these words were spoken were, one would have thought, sufficient to make an impression on the most obdurate heart; but it was not so. Jonathan stood with his arms folded, looking at his helpless victim, while a grim smile of derision curled his lips.

"And so," he said, "this is the result of your reflections. I see, I have only had useless trouble after all. This is what one gets by being over thoughtful and indulgent."

"Indulgent!" repeated Sir Marmaduke, who seemed infuriated by the bitter mockery of his persecutor. "Indulgent? How? In what way?"

Jonathan held up his hands in affected astonishment.

"Do you pretend you are ignorant of my kindness to you? Well—well, we must not look for our reward on earth."

"No," exclaimed the prisoner; "but most assuredly will you meet with it in hell!"

"Ha! ha! That is a place to frighten children with. A bugbear that has for me no terrors. What I am I am. When I die my body will resolve into the elements, and all will be over. A future state—ha! ha! The idea is most absurd, though I give the man credit who was the first to broach it. A cunning priest was he."

Sir Marmaduke shuddered, as he heard the thief-taker utter such blasphemous opinions. He said nothing. He felt how useless it would be.

"But this is idle talk," said Jonathan, as he again took from his pocket the cunningly-worded paper the baronet was so near signing the day before.

"Come," he said, "delay no longer. Freedom is sweet to all men. Purchase it, ere it be too late."

"Purchase it! but at what a price!"

"Your name, Sir Marmaduke, will remain untarnished if you adopt this course, and surely you can feel the desirability of that."

"No—no, I cannot—I cannot. I should live, but to what end? To be cursed by my poor children. Fiend, are you deaf to all entreaty? Can no words, no supplications move you? Surely, your heart cannot be all stone!"

"Cease this: it is worse than useless."

"Will nothing move you?"

"Nothing but compliance with my demands."

"Oh! my God! my God!" moaned the unhappy knight. "What shall I do? How shall I act?"

"Ask yourself," said Wild, "and not an invisible, non-existing power. Be a man, and not a fool."

"And do you call that being a man?" asked Sir Marmaduke. "Do you call your actions manly? Are you a man? If so I should wish to be a demon!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wild, but he was clearly ill at ease. "It is amusing, most amusing, but I have had enough and too much of this. Here is the paper. Sign it, and be free!"

As he spoke, Jonathan thrust the paper into his hands. It was taken almost mechanically.

Who can tell what fearful struggles he had had when alone in the darkness and solitude of his cell? Who could tell what struggle was even then going on in his breast? Enviroed as he was by evils, turn in which direction he would, decision was impossible. The only thing of which he was properly conscious was that he did not possess the right, even if he had the will, to abalienate his possessions from his lawful heirs.

Still he hesitated.

And, let it be asked, under the circumstances, was it at all wonderful that he should? Alas! no. For a long time he had resisted all the specious arguments which Wild had urged—resisted them with a pertinacity which would elicit the greatest admiration; but in proportion as his bodily frame grew more and more enfeebled, so did his steadfastness diminish.

"Sign!" said Wild, again taking a pen from his pocket, which he forced into the prisoner's grasp; "sign and be free—free! Free to look again upon the glorious sunlight, to see the children of whom you are so fond."

"And would they," asked the baronet, in tones of mournful pathos, "would they be fond of me? No, no; rather would they call down the bitterest execrations upon their miserable parent."

"Phsa!" said Wild, "think not of that. Surely it would be better, bad as it might be, than to suffer a violent and ignominious death at the hands of the common executioner."

"Alas! that such should under any circumstances be the fate of a gentleman. It should be reserved for wretches like yourself—for whom, however, such a punishment is too good."

"That is entirely a matter of opinion. But, come, I have dallied with you long enough, and my patience is at an end. Sign—sign, I say."

There was a kind of stone bench or settle near that part of the dungeon where Sir Marmaduke lay upon the straw, and towards this place he crawled.

He spread the paper smoothly upon it.

Observing what he was about, Jonathan, with his whole countenance lighted up with demoniac exultation, picked up the lamp and directed its beams upon the writing.

Silently, too, he unhooked from the button of his coat an ink-horn, which he placed upon the stone seat.

The poor prisoner's eyes were dim. Tears, too, which he could not control, suffused them. He made several vain efforts to decipher it.

He did not give it a thought that the document had been purposely written in a cramped and illegible hand.

"Never mind the words," said Jonathan, "why do you wish to trouble about them. You know their import; that surely should suffice."

"Yes, yes, as you say; what matters it? Give me the pen."

"You have it in your hand."

"Ay, so I have; I had forgotten. The ink!"

"It is beside you."

"Farewell to my once happy home and smiling grounds. Farewell to all happiness on earth. These few strokes of the pen will deprive me of them for ever."

As he spoke these words he seized the pen, and hastily affixed his signature.

But while he was in the very act, and before he had finished forming the characters, a strange voice, coming apparently from the roof, spoke.

"Do not sign the deed, Sir Marmaduke!" it said; "if you do you are lost indeed! Jonathan Wild will have you arraigned for treason, and executed all the same!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE THAMES POLICE CHASE JONATHAN WILD.

Too late.

The pen fell from the nerveless grasp of Sir Marmaduke. But the warning voice came too late.

He had affixed his signature to the deed.

Jonathan Wild uttered a yell.

At first its tones were those of terror, but they quickly merged into anger.

He recognized the tones.

The shock upon the debilitated mind and body of the baronet was so great that, for a moment or two, he was bereft of speech and motion.

Wild was the first to recover himself.

He made a snatch at the document he had taken so much trouble to obtain.

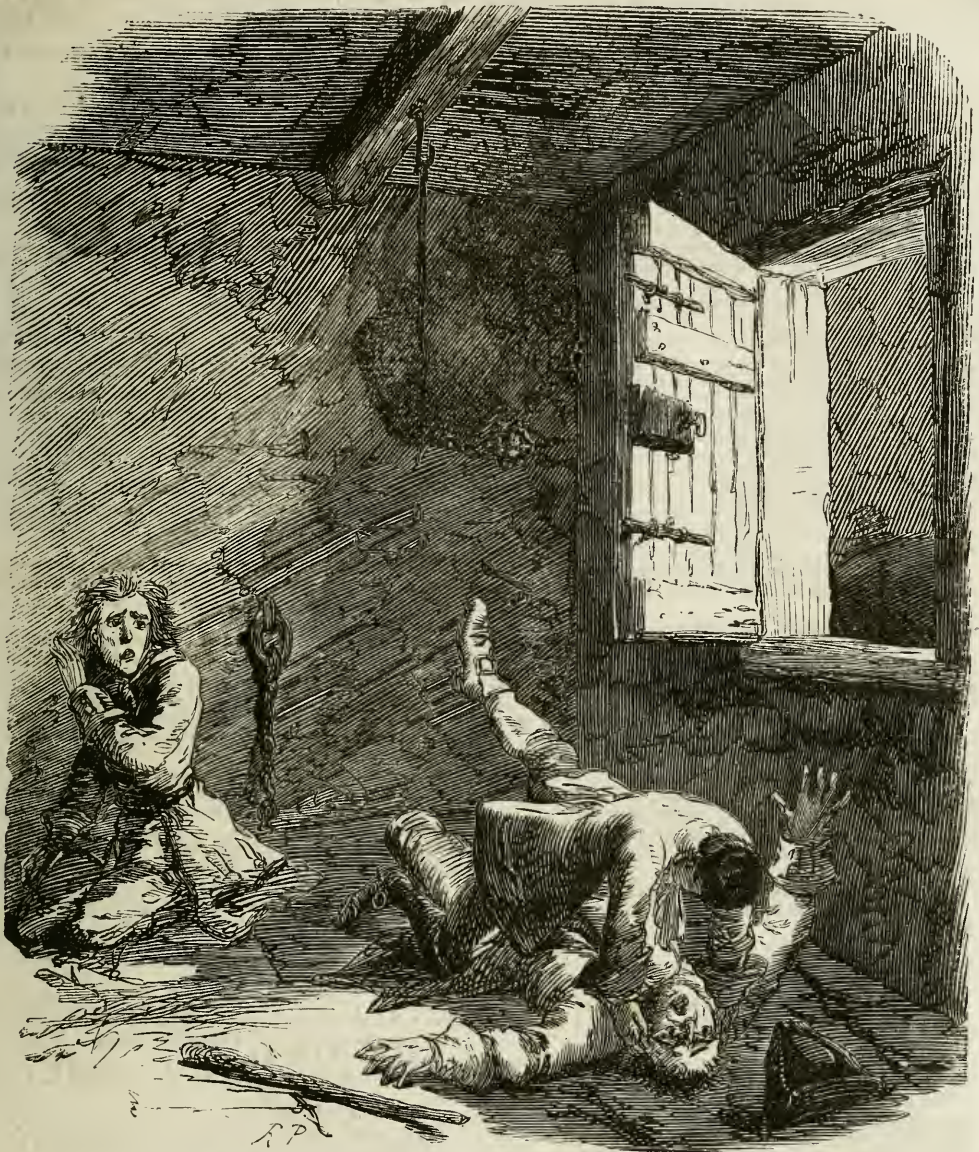
The baronet was too bewildered to be able to prevent him.

Leaving him to recover as best he might, Jonathan, after thrusting the paper into his pocket, strode from the cell.

We have said that he recognized the voice, and he understood in a moment whence it had proceeded.

But as the reader does not, we must go back a little way.

When Jack was locked in the dungeon, he remained standing where he was without moving hand or foot, partly from the dread he had of walking in a strange place



[JACK SHEPPARD SQUARES ACCOUNTS WITH JONATHAN WILD.]

in the dark, and partly to listen to the receding footsteps of his jailers.

There was apparently no other aperture to the cell than the door by which he had entered. Certainly there was none through which the faintest scintillation of light penetrated.

As he thus stood, he, to his surprise, distinctly heard a door open.

That is the one leading into Sir Marmaduke's cell.

Then he heard the voice of the villainous thief-taker.

Every word he spoke Jack heard with as much distinctness as he would have done if Jonathan had been standing at his elbow.

The baronet's reply followed.

Jack listened to the conversation which ensued with an interest that knew no bounds.

By a species of intuition, which formed a leading trait in his mental composition, Jack divined the whole of the affair from first to last, in all its ramifications.

And now he found that every moment his eyes became

more and more accustomed to the darkness wherewith he was surrounded, and he was enabled to see, dimly and imperfectly, it is true, the different objects in his cell.

He was, however, at a loss to account for the plainness with which he heard all that was going on in the contiguous dungeon.

He placed his hands against the walls.

They were cold and slimy, and apparently of solid stone.

From this circumstance he was forced to the conviction that there must be somewhere in the wall, which divided his cell from that in which Jonathan and his prisoner were, an opening of some kind.

A more attentive auscultation convinced him that this must actually be the case, and that its situation must be somewhere near the roof of the cell.

In this supposition Jack was perfectly correct.

The series of cells in which he was placed communicated with each other by a square aperture.

This contrivance, insufficient as it was, was for the purpose of ventilation.

The beams of the lantern which Jonathan carried made the exact locality of this opening in the wall apparent, and Jack came to a sudden determination to try to reach it, and so be not merely an auditor but a spectator of what was going on in the adjoining cell.

He carefully estimated the distance, and shook his head.

He felt that to reach it without something to stand upon would be an impossibility.

The height from the floor to the bottom part of the aperture was at least ten feet, and although it was just possible that he might by a vigorous spring reach it with the tips of his fingers, yet he would not be able to take a firm hold.

He cast his eyes about him for some means of accomplishing his purpose.

But he could find nothing.

A quantity of straw, in a very humid state, littered down in one corner, was all there was to provide him with a bed.

To be sure, against the wall opposite to the door there was a kind of stone settle similar to that in Sir Marmaduke's cell, but this was of no service to him, since it was a fixture.

At last he found a pitcher, which had probably been used to convey water to some former inmate of the cell.

It was empty, and Jack thought that by turning it bottom upwards he would, by placing it under the hole he was so anxious to reach and standing upon it, be able by giving a spring to take firm hold of the stone-work with his hands.

He made the attempt, and was successful.

The muscles in Jack's arms and wrists were very strong, and his body light, so he was able, after shifting his hands a little, to draw himself up; a feat which he had seen frequently performed by mountebanks.

When he had done this, he found he was able to see what was going forward.

Sir Marmaduke had taken the pen in his hand, and was about to affix his signature to the deed.

Jonathan was standing behind him.

The lamplight fell upon his visage.

Its expression was truly awful.

It was at this moment Jack shouted out the warning to the baronet not to sign the deed.

But, as we have seen, he was too late.

Sir Marmaduke, with the rapidity of thought, signed his name.

The accents of Jack's voice were only too well-known to Wild, and he comprehended in a moment what had taken place.

Therefore, the cry of terror which first came from his mouth quickly changed its note to rage, and he rushed from the cell.

Clearly his intention was to pay Jack a visit, and wreak his vengeance upon him.

But Sheppard had found that the hole in the wall was large enough for him to force his slender body through, and, before Wild could get the fastening of his cell door undone, he had crawled completely through the opening.

To drop down then into Sir Marmaduke's dungeon was a matter of no difficulty whatever.

Jonathan Wild uttered another yell when he found the cell was empty.

He knew well enough there was no other means than the hole near the roof by which Jack could have left the cell, and he could scarcely believe it possible anyone could have got through such a contracted aperture.

With more rage swelling in his heart than he had ever before felt, the thief-taker rushed back to Sir Marmaduke's cell.

But Jack heard him coming, and was prepared to receive him.

The first thing almost that Jack saw on reaching the ground was the bludgeon Jonathan was so fond of carrying about with him.

He could scarcely contain his delight at the lucky chance by which so formidable a weapon had been placed in his hands.

He took a firm hold of it.

As for the unfortunate victim of Wild's rapacity, the unfortunate baronet Sir Marmaduke Osborn, he was in

such a state of mental confusion that he could only partially comprehend what was taking place around him.

He huddled himself up into as small a compass as he could, and shrank close against the wall.

He clasped his hands together.

The predominant expression upon his features was mute and undefined terror.

Whether to look upon Sheppard as a friend or persecutor he knew not, and so remained helplessly awaiting the result.

But we have said when Jack heard Jonathan coming he took up a position to receive him.

That position was against the wall by the door.

With both hands he held Wild's formidable bludgeon above his head.

Blinded by passion, Jonathan made a rush into the cell.

There was a sickening thud—the sound that is produced by violently bringing down some hard and heavy instrument upon some softer object.

Jack had struck Wild on the head with his bludgeon.

He fell down like an ox at the shambles.

In all probability had such a blow alighted upon any other head than the thief-taker's, it would have been a fatal one.

But not only had prescient Nature bestowed upon Wild a skull of unusual thickness; he had adopted measures to guard against any such little contingency as that which had just happened.

This means was to have placed inside his hat a framework of steel, so cunningly contrived that it was almost as great a protection from a blow as a helmet would have been.

But the unexpectedness and suddenness of Sheppard's attack, coupled with the force of the blow itself, made him reach the floor in a state bordering closely upon insensibility.

Strong as the bands of steel inside his hat were, they were not strong enough to wholly exempt him from the effects of such an attack.

No sooner did Jack see his foe prone upon the floor than he threw away the cudgel and sprang upon him, intent upon recovering and destroying the deed Sir Marmaduke had signed.

With no little difficulty he rolled the inert body of the thief-taker over on to his back.

No sooner, however, did he accomplish this feat than he perceived Jonathan suddenly recover from his swoon.

Wild's first impulse was to clutch Jack by the throat.

But the latter, although no match for Wild, had an advantage that made him more—far more.

He was uppermost.

Quick as thought Jack caught hold of Jonathan by the ears and hair near them, and then, pressing his knee upon his chest, banged his head upon the dungeon-floor.

Crack! crack! crack!

Those were the ominous sounds produced by the contact.

Jonathan's hold relaxed.

Jack lifted his head up an inch or so higher, and brought it down with additional force, in order to give what the French term the *coup de grace*.

This time Wild was thoroughly insensible.

Jack now proceeded to look for the deed, and seeing a piece of roughly-folded paper projecting from Wild's pocket, he, making no doubt it was what he sought, transferred it to his own.

His next care was to look after Sir Marmaduke Osborn.

Still crouching, like some wild animal at the end of his chain, was this one of many victims of Wild's brutality.

Who, to gaze upon that trembling and emaciated form, would imagine it to be that of a gentleman of rank!

No one.

Jack Sheppard shuddered as his eyes rested on this piteous sight.

"A day of reckoning for work of this sort must surely come at last," he said, "and then will Jonathan have to beware."

He picked up the lantern as he spoke, and made a step forward in the direction of Sir Marmaduke, who, however, with a faint moan of terror, endeavoured to shrink closer to the wall.

His demeanour was abject in the extreme.

But in his lack-lustre eyes there came occasionally a fitful gleam, that told Wild by his cruelty and persecution had lighted up the fire of insanity in his brain.

Jack strove by speaking softly to reassure the trembling being before him.

"Sir Marmaduke Osborn," he said, "for such I gather is your name and title, accept all the assurances that I can give that from me you have nothing to fear."

"Fear—fear!"

"Yes," said Jack, in louder tones, "nothing to fear from me. Your enemy you have seen me overcome. He lies there bereft of power to do you harm."

Re-assured by Jack's words, Sir Marmaduke rose to his feet, and looked intently in the direction in which he pointed.

Jack held the lantern so that its beams fell chiefly on Wild's body, which they lighted up with a horrible distinctness.

For some moments Sir Marmaduke gazed upon his persecutor in silence, and then in a strange, hoarse, trembling whisper, he spoke.

His words seemed to be more addressed to himself than to his rescuer.

"Can it be true that he is dead at last?" he asked. "Can it be possible? No, no. He is not dead yet—he never will die. Fiends like angels are immortal!"

CHAPTER XL.

JACK SHEPPARD DESPAIRS OF AGAIN SEEING THE LIGHT OF DAY.

THIS thought was quite a novel one to Jack, and he glared at the speaker with considerable astonishment.

"I don't think he's dead, myself," he said, after a pause; "and I sincerely hope he is not. I have already quite enough to answer for, without that."

Sir Marmaduke advanced as far as his chain would allow him, in order to obtain a nearer and a better view of his arch enemy. He could scarcely believe it was really him who lay there so powerless.

"I should be very sorry to have his death at my door. But come. If he is moveless now, he will not long remain so. If we are to escape, our measures must be taken promptly."

There was something magical, one would think, in the pronunciation of that one word escape, for it had an effect which probably nothing else would have had. It called into being all the latest energies Sir Marmaduke possessed.

"Escape! escape!" he cried, wildly. "Who speaks of escape? That is music. The sweetest music ever drank in by my ears."

"I say escape!" said Jack, who had chivalrously determined not to leave the poor baronet behind him a prisoner. "I say escape! Rouse yourself! Shake off the vapours that obscure your brain. I will lead you to freedom!"

"But my fetters," cried Sir Marmaduke. "I am held fast here by a chain which would require a thousand times my strength to snap asunder."

"We will soon put that right," said Jack, cheerfully.

"Very soon—you'll see! It locks, I suppose."

"Yes—yes."

"Then you may depend somewhere about Wild's person is the key that will unlock it. I will find it and set you free from that, at all events."

Jack, as he spoke, knelt down beside Jonathan, and, after a brief examination of his pockets, brought out a small bunch of keys.

Carrying them constantly in his pocket had given to them a high degree of polish, and they glittered faintly in the lamp beams.

"Here you are," said Jack, as he rose, "Jonathan won't wake up just yet. Now, I will soon free you from that incumbrance."

With eager haste the poor prisoner held forward that portion of his fetters where the lock was situated.

Jack had to make a good many trials before he found the right key. They were nearly all small enough to go in the lock, but they would do no more.

At length, as he took the keys regularly one after the other, he came to the right one.

The bolt went back with a snap.

The chains which had so long cramped his limbs fell on the floor of the cell with a jingling sound.

"Summon to your aid," said Jack, as he led Sir Marmaduke towards the door, "summon to your aid all the strength you possess, for, rely upon me, you have need of it. Let the thought of so speedily rejoining your wife and children, of whom you profess to be so fond, nerve you to the utmost. You can defy the villain Wild now, and all his power. When you are once at liberty, you can take such steps as will enable you to successfully elude his fiendish malice. Come, come!"

"I will, my kind preserver," said Sir Marmaduke, who was rapidly recovering from the shock his mental system had sustained. "Be patient with me, my young friend, for young I perceive you are. It will not be possible for you to form any conception of the agony of all kinds I have gone through. Do not wonder that, with starvation superadded, I am the weak, miserable creature which you see."

"I can imagine easily, from my short sojourn in the adjoining cell, what you must have endured."

"You, too, then, were brought here a prisoner by that monstrous villain, Jonathan Wild?"

"I was."

"But you luckily escaped before the dampness of the dungeon sapped your life-springs. To see me now and to have seen me as I was a month ago, you would never believe it was the same being."

"A month?"

"Yes, such I believe is the time I have been incarcerated here, though to me it has seemed more like an eternity than thirty days."

"The time limps along but sluggishly under such circumstances."

"It does—it does, indeed. But, my young friend, my brain is confused; let that be my excuse for not having earlier attempted to find words wherewith to express the gratitude I owe you. Believe me I"—

"Don't say a word on that score," said Jack; "I have as yet done nothing except recovered the deed to which you, in a moment of weakness, affixed your signature."

"Ah! that deed of exheredation! Where is it? where is it? You have it, do you say?"

The manner in which these words were jerked out rather than enunciated testified to the anxiety of his heart.

"It is here," said Jack, as he thrust the paper he had taken from Wild into the baronet's hands; "Do not stay to look at it now," he added, as he saw he was about to unfold it, "put it in your pocket."

"Why not destroy it?"

"You can do so if you wish; but think what an important link it will be in the evidence against Wild."

"You are right, my friend, it will. You are youthful in appearance, but you have the wisdom of age. I will keep the deed."

"Do so, sir; but be careful not to lose it. You would find it an awkward matter for yourself were it to get into inimical hands."

"It would, indeed. There, it is quite safe now."

"You speak much better than you did."

"Oh! yes."

"That is well."

"I am much stronger. What you have said and done has reinvigorated me to a greater extent than I believed possible."

"I am most glad to hear it. But come, it is time we left the precincts of this place. Let me go first. I shall then be able to assist you to reach the passage."

"Thanks, my friend. But have you no name by which I can call you?"

"Oh! yes; mine is a very common sort of name."

"Let me hear it. It will always afford me pleasure to pronounce it. What is it?"

"Jack."

"John what?"

"No, not John; but Jack, plain Jack."

"But you have a second name?"

"I suppose I have."

"Then tell it me. Why do you manifest so much reluctance at doing so?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but my name's Jack Sheppard, and now let us be off."

"Jack Sheppard?"

"Yes."

"Jack Sheppard! I repeat the name, my young friend, in order to imprint it the more deeply on my memory. Believe me, I shall never forget it, nor cease to feel grateful for"—

"There, no more of that," said Jack, rather brusquely. "It's really disagreeable to do anyone a good turn."

"My young friend," said Sir Marmaduke, who got stronger every moment, "my young friend, I like you none the worse for deprecating my gratitude. It is the sign of a good nature. But since the verbal expression of gratitude is so distasteful to you, permit me to make you a suggestion."

"I cannot refuse," said Jack, who could not help feeling some amount of awe at the dignity with which the worthy baronet spoke.

"I know nothing of your position or occupation in life, Jack Sheppard, but from your raiment I judge that it is no better nor so good as it might be. Now, when I am once free from this hateful place, I shall then be in a situation to make you some more tangible expression of gratitude than I could by mere lip service."

"Then let the offer stay till then," said Jack, as he sprang up into the passage, and held out his arms to assist Sir Marmaduke, who gladly accepted the proffered aid.

He stood for a moment to regain his breath, and then he placed his hand detainingly upon Jack's arm.

"You rise still higher in my estimation. Suffer me to speak. If you will permit me, I will see that your future lot in life is nearer what you wish than I am sure it is at present."

"Sir!" said Jack overcome by the generosity of the man he saved, and the reflections to which his words had given birth, "Sir, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and"—

"It is now my turn to interrupt," said the baronet, with a wan smile. "I can assure you any thanks from you would come with a bad grace, for you have nothing to be grateful for."

"Nothing!" repeated Jack. "If you but knew all, or that I had seen you earlier."

"Remorse tinctures your voice," said Sir Marmaduke. Surely, one so young and full of generous impulses as you are, can have done nothing serious of which you should repent."

"There you mistake," said Jack, whose thoughts reverted to the young girl who had so unequivocally displayed the affection she felt for him, and how deeply he was already stained with crime. "There you mistake. I am already criminal."

"Criminal!" said Sir Marmaduke, in accents of the most intense surprise. "Criminal? Impossible."

"And yet true," said Jack, mournfully.

His better angel was just then in the ascendancy.

"But how am I to reconcile such a statement with your behaviour to me?" asked Sir Marmaduke, with an incredulous air. "There appeared nothing of the criminal in that."

"Oh! believe me, sir," said Jack, "I have been forced by fate to be what I am. Not upon my head rests the responsibilities of my actions, but upon others who made me what I am."

"Your history must have been a strange one, and"—

"But this is no time to tell it," said Jack, suddenly recollecting his perilous position, of which, during the brief but interesting colloquy, he had been equally as oblivious as his companion. "We must turn our thoughts to the mode in which we are to leave Wild's house. We are, properly speaking, scarcely any freer than we were in the dungeon."

"Oh! yes—oh! yes," said Sir Marmaduke. "My mind is restored to me; my chains undone."

"I grant that, but Jonathan's house is not one which you can walk out of unquestioned; if we are to be free we must fight our way over many an obstacle before we can be so."

"I am ready, my young friend, to place myself entirely under your guidance, and act as you may think proper to direct."

CHAPTER XLI.

JONATHAN WILD RECOVERS FROM HIS SWOON, AND TAKES SOME RATHER ENERGETIC PROCEEDINGS.

"THEN," said Jack Sheppard, "the best thing we can do is to make sure of one thing."

"And what is that?"

"Why, if Jonathan Wild should wake up rather sooner than I expect, he will find it impossible to follow us very quickly."

"No, no; stay."

"For what?"

"Surely you cannot contemplate such a deed. Leave him to the punishment of his own guilty thoughts."

"Eh?" said Jack, who was quite in a fog.

"Spare his life. Surely you cannot murder him?"

"Murder him," said Jack; "bless you, I would not on any account cheat the hangman of his due."

"Forgive me," said Sir Marmaduke, "for doing you so much injustice as to think you capable of such a deed; and yet I thought your words implied as much."

"I meant no more than I said," replied Jack, "and this is it."

As he spoke, he shut the door of the cell in which Wild lay so motionlessly.

The key was in the lock.

To turn this was the work of a moment.

Then he shot the two bolts into their sockets.

Jonathan Wild was a prisoner in one of his own dungeons.

"There!" said Sheppard, with an air of the greatest satisfaction, "he'll have some little trouble in getting out of that, I rather think, or giving the alarm to any of his men."

"So I think; but now, my young friend, having disposed of him, what do you intend to do next?"

"That, sir, is more than I can tell you, beyond making the attempt to leave his house with all speed possible."

"Yes, yes; which is the way?"

"I am again at a loss," said Jack, as he held the lantern above him so as to diffuse its rays as much as possible, "I know no more of this place than I was likely to gather from being dragged into it a prisoner."

"It cannot much matter, said Sir Marmaduke, "which way we turn. I think it almost certain the passage cannot be of any extraordinary length."

"No, certainly not, so we should soon come to the end of it. Come, let us take the turning to the right."

As it so happened, this was turning away from the secret door that led to Wild's other cells, and as we stated upon a former occasion, Sir Marmaduke's cell was the last but one in the row, they were not long coming to its termination.

In fact, they saw the wall of which the end was composed without knowing what it was. Being of one uniform black tint, they took it to be merely darkness.

When they found, however, it was a complete and solid obstacle to their further progress, Jack said—

"Well, this has not been much trouble, has it?"

"Can you see no outlet?" asked Sir Marmaduke, anxiously.

"None."

"No door?"

"No. This, I take it, is the wrong end of the passage altogether."

"But what is that to your left hand?"

"Only one of the cell doors, I think. You will perceive it differs in no respect from the rest."

"I see now. Then you think at the other end we shall find an egress?"

"Yes, yes. Make haste. We have already wasted too much time."

Both now hurried along the passage with as much speed as they could, and in a few seconds they reached the secret door.

But it was a secret door on the other side only.

The spring by which it was secured was plainly visible.

Jack was just on the point of pressing on the spring when Sir Marmaduke stayed him.

"What is it?" asked Jack, with some impatience.

"My young friend, I have a proposition to make to you. If you decline it, well and good; if you accept it, as I think you will, it will be the means of raising you to a still greater height in my estimation."

"Speak," said Sheppard. "What is it?"

"This: I do not know whether there may or may not be in these dungeons some other unfortunates like myself, the victims of Wild's brutality. You have in your hand the key with which you locked my dungeon door. It will be the work but of a few moments to unlock all the other cells, and make sure that neither has an inmate."

"It shall be done," said Jack, "I ought to have thought of that myself."

"It is rather surprising neither of us thought about it earlier than we did. But, however, we have thought of it in time."

"Just so, and if we find in the dungeons only one prisoner, our work will not have been in vain."

"I am rejoiced," said Sir Marmaduke, as they both together made their way to the first of the cells, "to hear you speak of the matter as you do."

"I can feel for others in the same predicament as myself, and think what I should like some one else to do for me were they in my position."

"Exactly. That is a simple and a just method of looking at the matter."

"Hold the lantern, Sir Marmaduke," said Jack, "and then I shall be able to see what I am about."

"Willingly."

Jack now, having his hands quite unencumbered, drew back the bolts at the top and bottom of the door.

Then he fitted the key into the lock.

Or rather he attempted to do so.

He discovered that Wild had been too cunning to have the locks on the cell doors all made after one pattern.

"We are done," said Jack, as he rapidly tried in succession the other doors. "It's no go."

"I am disappointed."

"And I am vexed."

"Let us tap at the different doors."

"I don't much like that. It can't be an over-satisfactory way of assuring ourselves no one is within."

"What else can we do?"

"It's rather hazardous."

"Then don't attempt it."

"That would not deter me. The thought of what peril I might encounter never made me hang back."

"There is a difference between despising danger and being temerarious."

"I tell you what I am going to do."

"Well?"

"Jonathan Wild, I have been told, has a master-key that will open every lock in his house."

"Yes—yes. Go on."

"This key he wears always suspended from his neck by means of a steel chain."

"But—but—"

"But what?"

"You don't intend, surely, to run such a frightful risk as to re-enter the cell where the villain is, and attempt to take it from him?"

"I do, though; and, what is more, will have it."

"Oh! my young friend, be guided by me in this matter."

"The danger is not worth mentioning. Jonathan cannot possibly, in this short time, have recovered from my treatment, and when he does I fancy he will be disabled a little."

While speaking these words, Jack boldly enough unlocked and unbolted the door, and then flung it open.

Sir Marmaduke shrunk back.

But feeling deeply ashamed of this manifestation of timidity, he came quite up to the threshold.

"Hold the light, Sir Marmaduke," said Jack. "Do not descend yourself, it is perfectly unnecessary."

Jack jumped lightly down into the cell, and made his way direct to the spot where Jonathan was.

Now, this fearlessness of demeanour was, to a great extent assumed, for Jack knew Wild was quite cunning enough, when he heard them coming, to be quite still, and pretend to be insensible until he actually reached him, and, when quite off his guard, to spring up suddenly and take him by the throat.

So, although Jack knelt down beside the thief-taker with assumptive carelessness, yet he was on the look out for some such event.

Jonathan, however, lay profoundly still, and was still perfectly insensible.

It was easy enough to find the chain that Jack knew he wore round his neck, and he pulled it off rather roughly.

Wild roused a little.

But Jack, having the master key firm in his grasp, jumped out of the cell, and slammed the door.

Mingled with the sound, there came from the interior of the dungeon an awful sound, such as no human being could possibly be supposed to produce.

"All right," said Jack, as he fastened the door carefully. "He will soon get tired of that sort of fun."

"Yes, but think how jeopardous would have been our situation if he had recovered before you could have left the cell."

"It would, I confess," said Jack, "but he didn't, so it is not worth while to speculate about it."

"You take things lightly."

"Sometimes. But let us, if we are to examine the other cells, begin at once, because every moment that we stay only increases the difficulty we shall find in leaving."

"There are two we shan't want to look into at all," said Sir Marmaduke. "One is the cell you have just left, and the other the one in which you were confined."

The change that had taken place in Sir Marmaduke Osborn was really wonderful. He no longer looked the same being. The abject, squalid aspect that he had worn disappeared. He held himself erectly, and though very weak, walked with a firm tread.

From the wreck he then was, after having survived the horrors of so long a confinement in a pestiferous dungeon, it was easy to see what he had been.

The simple fact of his having borne in mind that Wild might have other prisoners besides himself and the desire he expressed that they should be set free, suffices better than a whole page of laudatory matter to show the goodness of his heart, the unselfishness of his disposition.

Indeed, we think that under the circumstances, few persons indeed would be found who would be able to think of what others were suffering at that very moment.

"Let us go to the end of the passage," said Jack. "You know where I mean?"

"Yes, where the wall is, and the door I spoke to you about."

"Just so. Let that be the first we open. We will then take the others in succession."

"Agreed."

"If we do this, it will leave us when we have done close to the secret door, which will save us going over the ground unnecessarily."

This was obviously a capital arrangement. So they walked straight to the door which the baronet had noticed.

CHAPTER XLII.

SIR MARMADUKE'S EVIL DESTINY STILL PREVAILS, AND HURRIES HIM TO DESTRUCTION.

THAT they now stood upon the threshold of making some very remarkable discoveries in connection with the cells beneath Jonathan Wild's house in Newgate-street, Jack Sheppard and Sir Marmaduke Osborn did not entertain a doubt.

But Jack did not stop to speculate upon what was going to happen next, but proceeded to act without delay.

Sir Marmaduke still had the lantern in his grasp.

This, therefore, left Sheppard with both his hands at liberty.

He held up the master key.

Now, as this was rather a remarkable-looking instrument, we think it no more than right that a line or two should be occupied in its description.

It was formed of two pieces of steel each about four inches in length.

These two pieces had been laid one over the other, rectangularly, and then welded together so that it was in the form of a perfect cross.

Each of the four extremities of this cross were wrought into the shape of a key, but they all differed widely from each other, inasmuch as that one could only be used for opening a very small box indeed, while the largest would fit into a regular door lock.

Of course, the impossibility of having a single key that would open indiscriminately locks of all sizes, must be at once apparent, but by having four master-keys of different sizes made into one instrument, Jonathan had every lock in his dwelling at his command, from the biggest to the least.

This instrument would of necessity be an invaluable auxiliary to the two prisoners in consummating their release, as well as enable them to inspect the whole of the series of dungeons.

A glance at the size of the keyhole was sufficient to show Jack which was the key to be used, so he fitted it in and turned it round.

The bolt of the lock shot back with the greatest ease.

Jack next proceeded to draw back the bolts, when he perceived to his surprise that they had not been shot into their sockets.

"That doesn't look as though any one was in here," said Jack, as he kicked the door open with his foot. "Stand aside a moment, Sir Marmaduke, and let the foul air, if there be any, escape before you attempt to enter."

It was well Jack thought of taking this precaution, for though they both retreated to the opposite wall, yet even then they were not free from the noxious vapour.

The lamp which they carried burned dimly, and gave forth but little light.

In a few minutes, however, the fresh air mingled with the foul, and when the lantern burned as it had done formerly they ventured to enter the cell.

Jack went first.

Sir Marmaduke, with some little difficulty, followed him.

On reaching the centre of this place they both, by common consent, paused to look about them.

There was little food for curiosity.

A glance showed them it was quite vacant.

In shape and size it was in every respect similar to the one in which Sir Marmaduke had been confined, probably enough they had all been constructed after one model.

"There's nobody here," said Jack, "that's clear enough now, there hasn't been for some time, I should say."

"No, as you say, there is no one here," repeated Sir Marmaduke. "Let us hope that we may find all the others without tenants."

"I do hope it, I can assure you," replied Jack; "not, however, from the same motive as you do."

"What is it, then?"

"Why, there is no disguising the fact that the presence of one or two prisoners would be a great impediment to our ultimate escape."

"Do you think so, my friend?"

"I am sure of it. Nevertheless, the thought of that would never have sufficient weight with me to make me leave any one here exposed to Wild's tender mercies."

"That is right, that is right. I will hold the light so that we can take one last look around this dungeon, and then we will depart."

Sir Marmaduke elevated the lantern as he spoke, and directed the beam of light which issued through the lens, successively upon every part—floor, walls, and roof.

Nothing but the bare damp walls met their gaze.

"Quick!" said Jack. "We must be more expeditious with the others, or we shall not be out of the place before Wild is missed. 'Quick! quick!'"

He regained the passage as he spoke, and helped Sir Marmaduke to do likewise.

The next cell to that which they had just visited was the one in which Jonathan was in durance.

Jack could not resist the impulse to make some appeal to him.

He knocked sharply therefore upon the door with the master key.

A murmuring voice followed, as though Wild had made some verbal reply, but the door was too thick and strong to allow of the penetration of a human voice.

It was succeeded by a furious hammering, that threatened to break in the panels.

"What a horrible noise," said Jack. "I wish I could stop him. If he keeps that sort of thing going he will surely be heard by some of his janizaries."

"Come away—come away," said Sir Marmaduke, a half-terrified voice. "Come away at once."

It was a lucky thing for Jack that he followed his companion's advice so quickly as he did, for the knocking

ceased suddenly, and then a bullet came crashing through the door.

The report mingled with the sound, and if Jack had not just then stepped aside, the bullet would have assuredly have found a resting place in his body.

As it was it flattened itself against the stone wall opposite.

It is rather surprising that Wild did not fire a pistol through the door before, but his brain just then was not in a very lucid state.

Most unquestionably had he been in his ordinary state of mind, the first thing he would have done would be to reply to the knocking by firing his pistol in that direction.

But the hard blows Jack had given him had deranged his head-piece not a little. Indeed, it is something to wonder at that he recovered at all.

"Let us go, my young friend, let us go. Every moment now must increase the chance of our discovery. Indeed, the noise that has just been made cannot fail to have been heard by some of Wild's men."

"If they don't hear that," replied Jack, with a smile, "I rather think they won't hear any other noise we can make."

"Hasten, hasten," said Sir Marmaduke, whose nerves seemed to be again unbinged. "You don't know what may be the extent of that man's power even now."

"It strikes me," replied Jack Sheppard, "that it is confined to making a noise. But come, sir. Rouse yourself. Shake off your fears. Our danger now is very little, if any, greater than it was. We have yet to accomplish our task."

"True," said the baronet, recovering himself by an effort, "this is your cell door, is it not, and so there is no need of our entering that."

"None in the least, I can assure you."

They walked on now until they came to the next cell.

With all the speed possible Jack undid the fastenings.

When the door was opened, they again took care to stand and let the pure air disperse.

But this time they found mingled with it such a frightful odour, that it was full ten minutes before they could enter the cell.

"Hilloa!" said Jack, as he stood upon the threshold and peeped in, while Sir Marmaduke held the lamp over his shoulder. "Hilloa! I say, is there anybody here?"

A prodigious scuffling sound followed his words, and then all was still.

"Hilloa!" said Jack again, "we are friends come to release you. If there is anyone here, let them speak."

The echo of Jack's voice died away.

The silence of the tomb succeeded.

"This, too, is vacant," said Sir Marmaduke. "Let us try the next."

"No—no," said Jack, "did you not hear that strange noise when I spoke? What can it be?"

"Rats, perhaps."

"Most likely; but still," said Jack, "I should not like to leave this place until I had first satisfied myself by a personal visit that there was no one in it."

"Very well, my friend."

"Do not, however, Sir Marmaduke, I beg, fatigue yourself by descending too. If you will stand upon the steps with the lantern in your hand that will be all that I require."

"Be careful," said the baronet, as Jack jumped down in the dungeon, the floors of every one of which were between two and three feet below the level of the passage.

Jack's eyes were keen and accustomed to the very faint and dubious sort of twilight that filled the cell, and he uttered an exclamation as his eye fell upon some dark-looking object at its further extremity.

"What is it?—what is it?" asked Sir Marmaduke, hurriedly descending. "What have you found?"

Jack pointed to the dark object, and then slowly they both walked towards it.

There was something in both their demeanors which seemed to tell them what this dark object was.

But neither gave utterance to their convictions.

A few paces more, and they reached it.

It was a dead body, but so horribly mutilated and disfigured that, had it not been for the shreds of clothing which hung here and there about it, they could not have more than guessed at what it was.

These shreds of clothing also served to tell them the sex.

The buttons that were in different places upon it, and the material, proclaimed it to be a male.

For a few seconds Jack Sheppard and Sir Marmaduke stood gazing upon these remnants of mortality, and then the latter spoke.

"Another victim of that accursed villain, Jonathan Wild. Good heavens! that such things should be allowed to happen with impunity is enough to shake one's faith in an all-presiding Power, for, if this was not a case in which to interfere, there certainly can be none."

"I wonder who he is," asked Jack, "for a he he is, beyond a doubt. Perhaps some infernal rascal as bad as Wild himself."

"No, no, that cannot be. Ferocious animals do not prey on their own species. Jonathan Wild is in antagonism only with the innocent and good."

"The rats have had a rare feast off him, that's certain," said Jack, who was more engrossed by the frightful spectacle before him than he was with his companion's reflections. "They have eaten his face right away."

CHAPTER XLIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND SIR MARMADUKE EXPLORE THE SECRET DUNGEONS BENEATH WILD'S HOUSE.

"HORRIBLE, horrible, most horrible!" said Sir Marmaduke, as with a shudder he turned away. And it is from such a fate as this that you have doubtless rescued me. Oh! my young friend, how can I be sufficiently grateful to you? But my actions shall speak that which my tongue cannot."

"Poor fellow," said Jack: "I wonder now who he could have been, and why he was left to die such a death as this?"

"That, in all probability, we shall never know," replied the baronet, "unless the unfortunate man has left something by which we can trace out his identity."

"If he has done so I am afraid we are too late to find it. Almost everything appears to be destroyed. Lend me the lantern, sir, and let me take a closer look."

Sir Marmaduke gave the lantern to Jack, who, taking it in his hand, stooped over the prostrate form.

Narrowly, very narrowly, did Jack look about him for some such indication as he sought, but vainly. There was nothing.

The only piece of clothing that was really worthy of the name was the lapel of a coat, and though Jack could see the pocket in it yet he shrank from putting in his hand.

But it was only for about half a moment that this feeling had the mastery of him.

At the end of that brief space of time he, with an air of desperate resolution, stooped down and introduced his hand into the pocket.

Somewhat the presence of the pocket in that position, and the fact that every other portion of the unfortunate prisoner's apparel had, with the exception of a few shreds disappeared, engendered the notion in his mind that in that pocket would be found evidence to show who it really was.

But in this anticipation he was doomed to be disappointed.

The pocket was quite empty.

He was about to rise after having given vent to an exclamation, when the rays of the lantern happened to fall upon the wall near him.

Some strange scratches were visible.

"A clue, Sir Marmaduke! A clue!" he said.

"Where?"

"On the wall here, sir. If you stoop ever so little you will be able to see it."

Despite the repugnance which a man of such refined sensibilities as Sir Marmaduke Osborn would naturally feel at drawing closer to so loathsome an object as that before him, yet the intense curiosity he felt to gain some kind of information relative to Wild's victim submerged it.

He stooped.

He saw the scratches on the wall.

They were nothing more than scratches.

"Can you make out what it says, my young friend?" asked the baronet, for as Jack was the nearest, and besides

held the light, he had the best opportunity of discovering the signification of the marks. "Are they words?"

"Yes," said Jack, "they are words, that's true enough, but I can't make them out. I can read too."

"Let me try."

"I was going to ask you, sir, only I did not like to confess myself beaten."

"I daresay I shall be able to decipher it," said the baronet.

He took the light as he spoke, and getting as close to the wall as he could, strove his utmost to discover what the scratches meant.

That they were intended to represent letters could be seen at the first glance, but they were made in such an eccentric fashion that it was next to an impossibility to tell for what they were actually intended.

They extended, too, for some distance in a devious way along the wall.

By confining himself to the study of one character at the time he was able to unravel the whole.

The instrument, whatever it might have been, with which the letters were indented upon the wall, was clearly ill adapted for the task.

Sir Marmaduke repeated the letters one by one as he made them out.

We have said they extended for some distance along the dungeon wall.

This would, of course, convey the idea that it was a sentence of considerable length.

But such, indeed, was very far from being the case.

The sentence was a short one, and its extent was caused solely by the straggling manner in which the characters were formed, and the distance they were one from another.

The words were as follows:—

"I die of starvation—a victim of Wild's miscreancy. My name is Robt" —

That was all.

Jack drew a long breath.

"What is his name?" he asked.

"I cannot tell further than those four letters."

"Are you sure there are no more?"

"Quite! It seems to me as though he had endeavoured to go on, but there is only a little stroke."

"But," said Jack, as he bent forward to examine the last word of the inscription. "What could be his name? That is what puzzles me."

"What?"

"I mean, what name is there beginning with Robt?"

"There you puzzle me."

"Are you sure it is not intended for an e? They would then be the first letters of the name Robert!"

"It would. But it is an l I am convinced of that. If you look you will see that it is, if anything higher than the b before it. Now, no one would think of making an e like that."

"Well, I suppose not," said Jack, in a half-satisfied tone. "I should like to have known his name, for all that."

"And so should I. In that respect I am equally as curious as yourself."

"It is so vexatious," said Jack, that he should have begun to write his name and then left off in the middle of it."

"You are right, and yet, perhaps" —

"Perhaps, what?"

"Death might, in some sudden shape, have come upon him and cut short his work."

"That is likely enough, or else he found himself without strength to write more."

"It was one of those, you may depend. How strange and terrible! Never before did anything so excite my curiosity."

"And no wonder," replied Jack, who was, if anything, the more inwrought of the two. "It is the most dreadful thing I have ever seen or heard of."

"You may depend, the house of that arch fiend in human form is full of horrors."

"No doubt—no doubt!"

Let us take one more glance around us, and leave the place. We can do no good here."

"None!" said Jack; "and, besides, our present position is full of danger. I forgot everything in the discovery we have just made."

This was true on the part of both. Already, for their safety, had they wasted too much time.

With this conviction pressing upon their minds, they were not long reaching the passage.

They paused here for a moment and listened, but all was still, with the exception of a hammering which Wild kept up with untiring energy.

However, as is not unfrequently the case, the precautions he had taken to prevent the penetration of sound through the door of that gloomy region now militated against him.

Jack Sheppard and his companion paid no attention to this. They knew well enough that it was out of their power to prevent Wild making as much noise as he thought proper.

To have simply asked him to desist would have been ridiculous, and the means, in all probability, of causing him to make more.

There was no small amount of satisfaction to be derived from the circumstance that no alarm had as yet been raised.

The other dungeons, which Jack would insist upon thoroughly examining, did not repay them for their trouble, for they were without occupants.

They were, however, at ease upon one point.

And that was, with the exception of the villainous thief-taker himself, there was no living being in any one of those cells.

Once more, then, they stood near to that secret door, which, however, was anything but secret on the side upon which they stood.

Before, however, Jack ventured to press upon the spring, he thought it would be only prudent to ascertain by listening whether the coast was clear.

He therefore applied his ear to the woodwork.

The hammering noise Wild was making rather confused him.

But he listened as attentively as he could.

To the best of his belief there was no one in the passage on the other side.

This locality has already, in a former chapter, been described, but yet we think there can be no great harm done by reminding the reader that this passage, having a secret door at one end of it, had a very massive one at the other.

Beyond this there was a flight of stone steps, which conducted to the hall of Jonathan Wild's house.

At the end of these steps was an iron-door, made after the fashion of a gate.

This door was very strong indeed, besides which, night and day, a man always sat there on guard, who was able at once both to see and to hear whether anyone ascended the steps.

That a person would be able to do so without attracting his attention was almost an impossibility, unless, indeed, he had been sound asleep.

But Wild, who omitted no precaution to prevent a prisoner's escape, and knowing full well that sleeping on their lovely posts was a thing his men were much addicted to, he took measures to guard against this contingency by making it out of the question for anyone to open the iron door without waking him.

This he accomplished by connecting his seat in such a manner with the gate, that if he sat upon it, while the door was opened, he would inevitably fall to the ground, which circumstance, it is only fair to infer, could scarcely fail of having the desired effect of arousing him.

Beyond this iron gate again was the street-door, at which, as we have often had occasion to state, a man was invariably stationed.

The street-door was always fastened, and the listenings themselves were of such a complicated description, that anyone not acquainted with them, would have no small amount of difficulty in removing them.

Truly was Jonathan deserving of some amount of praise for the cunning steps he had taken to prevent the escape of those who might be unfortunate enough to fall into his clutches.

The contemplation of such obstacles would surely have the effect of daunting anyone. To hope to overcome such a complication of defences must be little short of madness.

From this it will be apparent, that though Jack had actually made his way out of his cell, and knew the

means by which the secret door might be opened, yet he was a very long way indeed from having achieved his freedom.

CHAPTER XLIV.

FRESH OBSTACLES RISE UP BETWEEN THE PRISONERS AND FREEDOM.

THE longer Jack listened at the panel of the secret door, the more certain he became that there was no one in the passage on the other side of it.

"All's well!" he said, as he once more assumed a standing posture.

"Are you sure?" asked Sir Marmaduke, anxiously.

"Sure of what?"

"That all is well."

"Yes. At least, as well as we could expect. There is no one in the passage."

"Then all is well, surely."

"So far, I say, it is; but there are other circumstances which require to be taken into consideration."

"Speak—speak!" said Sir Marmaduke, over whom there came a fresh access of his former terror. "Let me hear the worst at once!"

"Do not agitate yourself, sir," said Jack. "You must, if you wish to succeed in the present enterprise, be calm and cool."

"You are right, my friend. Time was when I should have taken the lead in an affair like this; but my long sojourn here, deprived of light and the common necessities of life, as well as suffering the most horrible persecution, has completely shattered me."

"Not so—not so," replied Jack, soothingly. "You have borne up bravely against it all. It is only by chance you lose command of yourself, that is all."

"But what where you going to say when I allowed myself to be so foolishly overcome with apprehensive dread? Speak, and let me know all."

"It is principally this," said Jack. "You hear what an incessant din Wild makes?"

"I cannot fail to do so."

"This secret door, you understand, by fitting so closely in its setting as it doubtless does, prevents the sound from going further than where it is, but the moment we open that door to pass out, we cannot at the same time avoid the sound escaping also."

Sir Marmaduke was silent for a moment, and then he said—

"It is, indeed, a serious matter, and one deserving of deliberation, and yet how to prevent it I cannot tell."

"Nor I, because there is not the faintest hope of getting Wild to desist."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it. The only thing we can do is to open the door, and pass out as quickly as possible."

"But let us do this as quickly as we will, we cannot prevent the noise reaching the ears of some of his men, who would, of course, surmise that something was amiss."

"I know all that. But what is to be done? We cannot stay here."

"That is quite evident. Could you not manage, through you, to cause Wild to desist for ever so short a time?"

Jack shook his head slowly.

"I fear not," he said.

"And yet it is worth a trial; because, if you could only devise some stratagem to keep him quiet for a few seconds, we should be all right, and he could hammer away then to his heart's content."

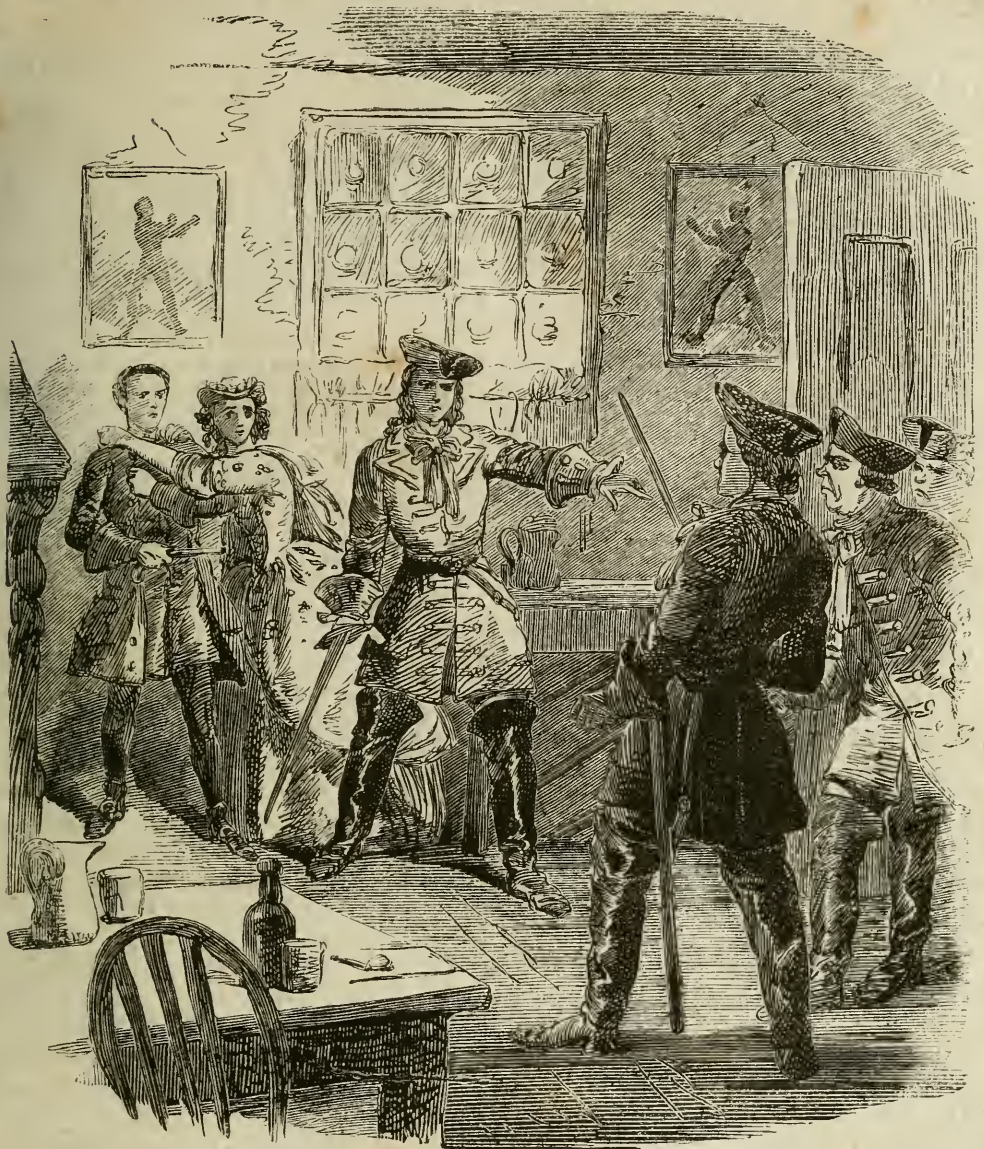
"But what stratagem can we adopt?"

"There I am at a loss. I can see only the necessity of one of some kind; for, from what you have said, I think it is pretty clear our discovery is inevitable if we open the door while he keeps making that noise."

"I can only think of one plan," said Jack, after a minute or two's thought, "and that is so defective that it is as bad as no plan at all."

"Let me hear it, my friend; perhaps I can furnish you with a hint or two."

"It is this. I thought of showing you how to open the door, and then myself going back to the cell door, and endeavour to get Wild into conversation. In the meantime, you would open the door and pass through it. As soon as you had done this, I would follow your example, and perhaps be able to shut the door before Wild quite



[BLUESKIN INTERPOSES BETWEEN EDGWORTH BESS AND JONATHAN WILD'S MYRMIDONS]

recovered from his astonishment. What do you think of it?"

"Why, that it has every chance of answering our purpose; that is, if you can succeed in attracting Wild's attention for a minute or two."

"I fear he will see through the whole manœuvre, and, in consequence, make more noise than ever. Still, as it appears to be our last chance, I think it had better be tried."

"Oh! by all means. And now, my friend, how does the door open?"

"Without the least difficulty whatever. All you have got to do is to press upon a this portion of the spring, and it flies open at once."

"I see."

"You think you will be able to manage it."

"Oh! yes."

"Then I am off. Above all, mind you take advantage of the very instant he desists, and open it and pass

through. You may depend upon my being at your side immediately."

"Leave that to me," said Sir Marmaduke, and now to do your portion, which is by far the most difficult and hazardous."

Jack Sheppard did not wait to say anything further, but seeing that all the arrangements were made, he ran along the corridor to the door of Wild's cell, taking care to make plenty of noise in his progress.

The perseverance with which Wild continued his hammering at the door was really surprising.

But he had a deeper motive than Jack at all imagined. What that was will very quickly be apparent.

It is very doubtful whether Jonathan heard Jack's approach, but if he did, it is quite certain he took no sort of notice, but went on as though he was working for his life.

Now Jack, on the former occasion, had seen the extreme peril and impolicy of standing before the door while he knocked at it, and he determined not to run the risk of a

hance bullet, if Jonathan had taken it into his head to fire another at random through the door.

Jack accordingly took up his station with his back against the wall, so that by reaching out his arm he could reach the door.

Sir Marmaduke watched his motions with the most feverish impatience.

Jack took from his pocket the clasp knife which had done him such good service at the "Grange."

It was a large and formidable-looking affair with a very large bone haft.

The baronet's impatience merged into curiosity.

But he soon saw to what purpose he was going to put his knife.

Holding it firmly in his hand, with the butt downwards, Jack extended his arm, and knocked loudly at the cell door.

The sharp rapping sound, which he thus produced, made itself heard above the din.

Wild heard it.

He stopped at once.

Making a rapid motion with one hand to Sir Marmaduke to open the door and get through it, Jack knocked again three times, distinctly and deliberately.

Then he waited for a reply.

It came in the shape of a wild animal sort of howl, which, even through the thick cell door, could be heard with tolerable plainness.

"Jonathan Wild!" said Jack, in a loud tone, and then, turning to Sir Marmaduke, he added, in an emphatic whisper, "Quick! quick! open the door!"

"I cannot," groaned the baronet, "the spring does not act."

"Curses!"

"It is quite firm! We are lost!"

Another howl came from Wild's cell.

He could tell something unusual was going on, but what it was he could not exactly make out.

Besides, his head was by no means in that clear condition that it usually was.

Jack had no other resource, so he tapped again.

"Jonathan Wild!" he said. "Jonathan Wild! Do you hear me speak?"

"Yes," Jack heard him reply. "Who is it? Let me out at once!"

From this speech it was pretty clear that Wild did not recognize Jack's voice.

At least, Jack thought so, but after all Jonathan might only be playing some deep game.

He was at a loss what to say.

"I will pretend I have not heard him, and ask him to speak again, and then be off."

At this moment Sir Marmaduke pressed upon the spring in the right manner, and the secret door flew open.

He passed through it instantly.

"What did you say?" cried Jack. "Speak louder, I cannot hear you!"

Then, in accordance with his plan, he did not stop to hear his reply, but ran swiftly, yet lightly, to the secret door, and closed it after him.

One difficulty was overcome.

Both the fugitives crouched as close to the wall then as they could, and listened.

All was still.

The darkness in the corridor was, to some extent, dispelled by a large iron oil lamp, which hung from the roof, near the centre of it.

Of course such a mode of illumination could not fail to throw many confusing and perplexing shadows, so that had anyone come by chance into the place, they would most likely have seen neither Jack nor his companion.

But as soon as he had assured himself that the coast was clear, the former hastened along the passage to the massive door at its termination.

This, had it not been for Jonathan's master key, would have been an insurmountable obstacle, but, as it was, it was nothing.

Jack hesitated a little before he put the key in the lock.

"For what do you wait?" asked Sir Marmaduke.

"I am unarmed," said Jack, "that is all."

"And I, too."

"I must find a weapon of some sort," said Jack. "I ought to have thought of that before."

"You have a knife. I saw you with it."

"I know I have, but that would only be useful against one assailant. It is some weapon like a sword that I want."

"Look!" said Marmaduke, "there is a wooden bar which fits across the cell doors. Would not that serve you?"

"It is the very thing."

"And the prisoners who may be here?"

"Oh! they are not of importance. The authorities are aware of this place, so that none would be confined here without good reason."

Jack, as he spoke, took from its setting one of the cross-bars of wood, which were used as an additional fastening to the doors of Wild's cells.

CHAPTER XLV.

JONATHAN WILD GETS DESPERATE INDEED.

In the hands of a desperate man like Jack Sheppard this bar of wood was a deadly weapon.

In length it was about five feet.

In breadth three.

It was formed of some very hard heavy wood.

Jack swung it round his head.

"Now I am prepared," he cried, "for all assailants. Take the key, Sir Marmaduke, and open the door."

For convenience and safety Jack had slipped the chain over his own head, and the baronet took it off.

"It will be the largest key," said Jack.

Sir Marmaduke inserted it in the keyhole.

The effort was almost beyond his strength, but he did manage to turn it.

The lock was well oiled, so that scarcely any sound was caused by the process.

It was an anxious moment when Jack, who went first, pushed the door open just wide enough to allow his slim anatomy to pass through.

The staircase before him was profoundly dark.

At the very top, however, he could see a faint gleam of light, which no doubt proceeded from the lamp in the hall.

Motioning to the baronet to follow him, with the utmost caution and silence Jack mounted the stairs.

He reached the top.

He crouched down and looked about him.

The iron door was within reach of his hand.

As usual a man was seated there.

He was very still.

Whether he slept or not Jack could not determine.

Having seen this, he proceeded to look yet further in advance of him, not only for the purpose of making himself familiar with the position of the different objects, but to see what else he had to contend against.

At the street door he could see the dim, shadowy form of the man on the lock.

On that night all was very still in and about Wild's house. Not a creature seemed stirring, and only at occasional intervals could be heard the rumbling sound produced by some vehicle in the street as it rolled past the house.

Jack fixed his eyes upon the door.

On the other side of it was freedom.

But to reach this he felt was all but an impossibility.

He felt assured that after that night's work everything in the shape of coalition was at an end between him and Wild.

The alliance had been but a brief one.

Henceforth Jack felt that Jonathan Wild and himself would be enemies.

He shuddered at the thought.

It was only for an infinitesimal space of time that this thought influenced him.

He was recalled to himself by the imperative necessity there was for instantaneous action.

Not only did his own safety depend upon the events of the next few moments, but his companion's also.

Sir Marmaduke crouched close beside him.

Jack held out his hand for Jonathan's master-key.

The baronet placed it in his grasp.

Then holding the wooden bar firmly in his left hand, and in such a position that he could, if need be, instan-

taneously seize it with his right. Jack Sheppard rose up like a ghost.

If the man who had charge of the iron-grated door had turned his head in the least degree he must have seen him.

But he did not.

Surely he must have slept.

With as much silence and secrecy as he could, Jack, with a beating heart, put the key into the lock.

He could not avoid making a slight noise. Besides, he was so excited that his whole body trembled.

Slowly, slowly, with a steady, constant motion, he turned the key round in the lock in the hope that he might unfasten it unheard.

But after going quietly for some time the lock, as he feared from its construction it would do, went back with a sharp snap.

The man who was sitting so close to him uttered a cry of dismay.

But Jack, with great promptitude, the moment the bolt of the lock went back in its socket, dashed the door violently and suddenly open.

The consequence was that the man, before he had time to escape, found himself almost crushed to death between the door and the wall, for Jack pushed with all his might.

The man who was on the lock, or in other words, who had charge of the street-door, set up a loud shout, and drawing a pistol from his belt, he shouted,—"Stand where you are, or I fire."

Jack saw now that all was discovered, and that he would have to fight his way to the street.

Sir Marmaduke kept behind him.

Whispering a word of encouragement, Jack, who had come to a halt upon the sudden command to do so, swung the heavy wooden bar round his head, and dashed forward.

The man on the lock was as good as his word, for he fired his pistol instantly.

But it was done too hurriedly for him to take an aim, and the bullet went with a crash through one of the balustrades of the staircase leading to the upper portion of the house.

Ere the echoes of the pistol-shot could die away, Jack reached this man, and with one terrific blow with the bar, laid him prostrate.

Then a terrible sound smote his ears.

It was a hideous howling cry, and such as some wild and ferocious denizen of the woods might be supposed to utter upon finding himself in the toils of the hunters.

Jack knew that there was but one human being who could give vent to such a sound.

That one was of course Jonathan Wild.

How he had got out of his cell he could not imagine, but that he had done so was a fact quite patent.

Quick as thought Jack turned to the fastenings of the door. Could he get them undone all would be well.

Jonathan Wild, with his huge hanger in his hand, rushed up the staircase.

Never before was he, or had he been, in such a state of infuriation.

Blood and foam were on his face.

His coat was torn in many places, his hat and wig were off, and his bald cranium had clots of blood upon it.

But though Jack did not know how the thief-taker had contrived to escape from the cell, there is no reason why the reader should remain in a similar state of ignorance.

Upon first awaking from the swoon induced by the blows he had received from Jack, Jonathan was quite at a loss to account for what had occurred.

In fact, his senses had only partially come to him.

He was, however, half conscious that hands were moving busily about his breast, and then perception fled from him altogether.

That was when Jack had taken the key from him.

This time he soon aroused, nor was he long in coming to a correct conclusion as to the actual state of affairs.

The first thing his hands touched, as he placed them on the floor, to assist himself to rise, was his bludgeon.

Quite a gush of delight came over him at once more having in his grasp his favourite and bloodthirsty weapon.

In fact, the possession of it went further towards restoring him to his senses than aught else.

In the first blind fury of the moment, he rushed at the door and commenced battering at it.

But, finding what folly it was to exhaust himself in a way that could do him no good, and being struck with a new idea, he dropped the bludgeon, and drew with great rapidity the heavy hanger which he habitually carried at his side.

Then with this weapon he renewed his assault on the door.

Of course he now stood a much better chance of achieving some beneficial result than he had done before.

The sharp steel sank into the wood.

Chips flew about in all directions.

He bruised his hands against the oaken panel in his frantic haste, but he heeded it not.

The splinters struck him in the face, but he did not cease his labour for a moment.

One idea only was present to his mind, and that was to escape from the cell with as much speed as possible.

Horrible curses, levelled at Jack Sheppard, came from his lips.

And so he kept on until, as the reader is aware, Jack tapped at the door with the haft of his clasp-knife.

That it was either of the prisoners he did not for a moment imagine. It was about the last thing they would be likely to do.

But when Jack left him, the suspicion entered his mind, and renovated by the brief rest he had had, he set about his work with redoubled energy.

The task he had set himself was to cut a large enough hole in the door for him to crawl through.

This, with the weapon he held, had he possessed sufficient command over himself, and set about it coolly, would not have taken one-fourth of the time it did.

But the desperate state of Jonathan's mind required just then that he should have some means of expending his superfluous strength.

Harder and harder, faster and faster, rained the blows upon the door, until, at last, he had the satisfaction of seeing into the passage.

Having once made a breach, the rest of the work was much easier, and he cut away the wood in long strips.

As soon as ever the hole was large enough, and, in fact, almost before it was, he began to crash through it.

It was in this way that his apparel got torn in the way it was.

He wriggled himself through, leaving behind him in the cell the best part of his coat.

He raised himself to his feet, and, then struck with a sudden thought, put his hand into his pocket and produced a flask.

From the strong odour which it spread around when he unscrewed the top it was pretty evident it contained brandy.

He placed it to his lips and took a long draught.

The alcohol had the effect of endowing him with thrice the strength he had possessed a moment before, and uttering a yell, he rushed along the passage to the secret door.

To one so well acquainted with its mechanism as he was, it took not a second to fling it open, and he dashed through.

Along the corridor through the massive door, which Jack had incautiously left open, instead of closing and locking as he ought to have done, and up the stone steps went Wild with undiminished speed.

Then he uttered that one frightful, howling yell, which was sufficient to strike dismay and terror into the hearts of all who heard it.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SHEPPARD AND THE BARONET MAKE A TEMPORARY STAY AT THE "JOLLY SAILORS."

THE state of affairs in the hall of Jonathan Wild's house was both peculiar and critical.

The report of the pistol as well as the cries of the man on the lock had the effect of rousing those members of the thief-taker's gang who happened to be indoors at the time, and they hastened with all the speed they could to the scene of action.

Jack Sheppard fumbled at the fastening of the door.

A chain which was twisted and knotted into many convolutions puzzled him.

At last it gave way.

But before he could introduce the key into the lock and open the door, Jonathan was upon him.

Wild held in one hand the hanger which had done him such good service, and in the other he held a pistol.

"Surrender," he yelled. "Surrender, or I'll shoot you where you stand."

"Never," said Jack, whirling the heavy wooden bar round his head. "Never, villain. Come on if you are tired of your life."

As he uttered these words Jack dropped the master-key upon the floor, and whispered to Sir Marmaduke—

"Quick—quick. Open the door. It is only locked now. Quick, I say, and all may yet be well. I will keep them at bay for a few moments."

The baronet stooped and possessed himself of the key.

"Drop that," roared Wild, as he saw the action.

"Drop that, Sir Marmaduke, or I fire."

But, paying no attention to what he said, Sir Marmaduke Osborn put the key in the lock.

Jonathan fired.

At the same instant three or four men rushed down the staircase.

Wild saw them.

"Fire!" he cried. "Shoot them both. Neither must escape. Fire, I say."

But ere the men could obey this order the baronet had unlocked the door and it swung open.

"Death and fury!" said Jonathan, rushing forward, but Jack met him with the wooden bar which he used in the fashion of a lance.

He caught Wild full in the chest, who, uttering a hideous groan, toppled backwards on to the floor.

"Fly, Sir Marmaduke," cried Jack, as he ran to the door. "Fly—fly—or we are lost."

The men on the stairs who had hesitated to fire when Wild interposed his body between them and their aim, now discharged their weapons.

But they were too late to effectuate anything.

In fact, the whole of these occurrences, so startling in their character, had happened so quickly that they hardly knew what they were about.

Indeed, although it has taken some time to relate, yet it would be no exaggeration to say that not more than a minute elapsed from the time Wild uttered the yell on the stairs until Jack and Sir Marmaduke rolled down the steps in front of Wild's house into Newgate-street.

Yes, rolled, for both lost their footing.

Jack grasped the baronet by the collar and raised him to his feet.

"Speak—speak," he said, hurriedly. "Are you hurt?"

"I fear so."

"Alas! alas!"

"Do not think of it. It is nothing."

"Can you bear up against it for a few moments? If you cannot we are lost indeed."

"I will do so."

"This way then," said Jack, and, lending all the assistance in his power, he dragged him round the corner into Newgate Market before Wild's men reached the doorstep.

At that silent hour of the night the old market was dark and deserted, but Jack was familiar with its intricacies, and he led his companion onwards with the greatest confidence.

In a minute or two they emerged into Warwick-lane, then a more disreputable and unsavoury thoroughfare than it is now, and Heaven knows that is needless.

Urging the baronet to make his utmost speed, Jack continued down Ave Maria-lane on to Ludgate-hill.

In this region all was still.

Dim and dark, and casting a huge shadow upon all about its base, was St. Paul's Cathedral.

Jack crossed over to the palings and there stopped.

"We may rest in safety now for a few minutes," he said. "We are, I think, out of immediate danger. Where are you wounded, Sir Marmaduke?"

The baronet was glad to cling to the iron church palings for support, as he said faintly,—

"It is nothing, absolutely nothing, my friend. I will just stay to recover breath, and then we will proceed."

"But," said Jack, who was far from satisfied with his

comrade's assurance, "tell me where you were hit. Is it bleeding?"

"Only a little. The bullet from Wild's pistol has grazed my ear and cheek."

"Is that all?"

"It is. At first I thought I was seriously hurt, but I am glad to say it is no worse."

"Then all is well. It is too dark here for me to see, but there is a lamp at the corner of Paul's Chain. Cross over and let me look at the wound."

This Sir Marmaduke was nothing loath to do, and, taking hold of Jack's arm, they immediately proceeded in the direction Jack had indicated.

For the benefit of those who may not be conversant with that portion of the metropolis, it will, perhaps, be as well to state that Paul's Chain is the name of a very narrow turning leading from the south side of St Paul's Churchyard to the banks of the river Thames at a point about midway between Blackfriars and Southwark Bridges.

As Jack had stated, there was at the corner of this street one of those miserable oil lamps which, by a stretch of imagination, were supposed to illuminate the streets of London.

But so far from doing this they only served, by the perplexing shadows which they cast, to make the surrounding darkness appear all the more obscure.

When, however, Jack stood close under this lamp, there was just light enough for him to see his companion's face.

As Sir Marmaduke had said, the bullet had merely grazed the side of his face. It had cut through the upper portion of his ear and furrowed up the skin along his cheek.

"You are all right," said Jack. "The blood has congealed over it, and it has now ceased to bleed. In fact, it can scarcely have bled at all."

"I am glad to hear that," said Sir Marmaduke, "for I am sure I have no blood to spare."

"No, indeed. In fact, it is a mystery to me how you have contrived to bear up so long as you have."

"It was the will."

"But you speak but faintly now, sir."

"Do I?"

"You do, indeed."

"I cannot wonder at it, for I am almost exhausted. Can you hear nothing of Wild and his myrmidons?"

"Nothing."

"Then perhaps there would not be much danger in our resting somewhere, and getting some refreshment."

"Very little. I was about to propose the same thing."

"But it is late. Where shall we find a place open?"

"Down nearer to the river's side, doubtless. But Sir Marmaduke, if you will take my advice, you will, with as little delay as possible, make your way homeward."

"That is what I should wish."

"Where is your abode?"

"At Tilburyness."

"Tilburyness? That is on the river bank, surely."

"It is, but it is some thirty miles from here."

"Make your way there at once. If you will be guided by me you will go by water."

"Why so?"

"Chiefly because you are more likely to elude Wild than if you went by road, besides which, in your present state, travelling by water would be best adapted for you, since it would be the easiest mode of transit."

"You are right."

"You may depend," said Jack, "that a terrible reaction will take place after this, and it therefore behoves you to be more than usually careful."

"Thanks, my young friend, for your caution! I will remember it."

During this brief dialogue, the pair had made their way at an easy pace down the street.

"We shall surely come to a public-house before long," said Jack, "where they have not yet retired to rest. We will halt there and take some light refreshment, for it would be most injudicious on your part now to make either a hearty meal, or partake of any strong liquors."

"I am well aware of that. A little bread soaked in wine and water will be, I should think, the best thing I can have."

"Undoubtedly."

"But," said Sir Marmaduke, after a moment's pause, "with regard to my getting to Tilbury."

"Well?"

"It is, as you must be aware, highly necessary that I should start off at once, and at this hour of the night, how are we to find a conveyance?"

"That will be difficult, no doubt, but we must see. If the public-house is anywhere near the water, the landlord will sure to be able to furnish us with every information."

"Of course—of course!"

"Come on then, sir. Let the recollection of the frightful perils we have passed through nerve you to fresh exertion. It is no slight thing to escape from the clutches of Jonathan Wild."

"It is not, as you say. And that brings more forcibly to my mind the value of the assistance you have rendered me. Not only have you freed me, but also obtained that document, which I was foolish and wicked enough to sign."

"The thought of having thwarted Jonathan Wild in one of his atrocious schemes, is for me a sufficient reward."

"I shall, though, feel offended and much grieved if you will not permit me to give you some tangible token of my gratitude for your exertions in my behalf. You are the saviour of myself from an ignominious death, my possessions from exheredation, and my family from want and ruin. In return for these inestimable services, the least you can do is to allow me, since I have the means of doing so, of seeing to your future welfare."

"To refuse the acceptance of your generous offer, Sir Marmaduke," said Jack Sheppard, in tones of deep emotion, "would not only be churlish but ungrateful. Heaven knows I have need of some strong hand to hold me back from the frightful doom towards which I seemed to be hurried along by the force of a malignant destiny."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE FUGITIVES MEET WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE.

SIR MARMADUKE OSBORN was not a little surprised at hearing such a speech from the lips of his companion, and he turned his eyes towards him with an inquiring glance.

But in the dark and narrow thoroughfare in which they were it was impossible for him to do more than just distinguish the dark outline of Jack's countenance.

"I rejoice," he replied, "not at you are so in need of help, but because it affords me an opportunity of showing you how highly I estimate your conduct in this affair. Throughout you have manifested a spirit of perfect unselfishness, a quality which is as rare as it is admirable."

Sir Marmaduke was quite right there. Whatever Jack's failings and vices may have been, he was truly and thoroughly unselfish, and so high a trait of character as that is sufficient to redeem many of his shortcomings.

But as the reader cannot fail to have seen, Jack Sheppard was purely a creature of circumstances, and it is by no means surprising that he should have imbibed the notion that he was urged onwards, without reference to his own volition, by fate or destiny.

But somehow he shrank from letting the conversation turn upon himself, so he hastened to change the theme.

"You speak louder than you did a little while ago. Do you feel better?"

"I spoke louder, my kind young friend, because of the spirit which actuated me. Believe me, my utmost wish now is to place you in a different and worthier position than that which you at present seem to occupy."

"Accept my thanks, sir, then for all that you have promised. But I must remind you that we are by no means out of danger. Jonathan Wild is not a man to go to sleep in such a case as this. You may depend he will try his utmost to get us once more in his power."

"I have more trust in heaven, and in the wisdom and evenhandedness of His dispensations, than to think that it would permit so base a villain to be triumphant, unless," he added, with a sigh, "unless it was by crowning all his bad with success to make his downfall more bitter and tremendous."

"But that, to my notions," said Jack, "we should not be right."

"Why not?"

"It seems to me a very insufficient reason for allowing others to suffer so much misery. I know yours is the

view the religious people take of such things, but I look upon it in a very different light indeed, and Providence, so far from being a beneficent power, is in reality an evil one, and rejoices more in bringing men to sorrow than it does in bringing them to joy."

"Those," said Sir Marmaduke, gravely, "are atheistic sentiments. They jar upon me. If you wish me to think well of you you will banish such opinions, which more befit a miscreant like Jonathan Wild than such as I would fain believe you are."

"At last!" said Jack, suddenly.

"What do you mean by that ejaculation?" asked the baronet, in tones of the utmost surprise.

"Why," replied Jack, "that we have reached that which we were seeking. Look before you on the right, and you will see a faint beam of light."

"I see it; and is that a public-house?"

"It is."

"How can you tell from this distance? You may be mistaken."

"No."

"You are confident?"

"I am, and for the best of all reasons."

"What is it?"

"I know the neighbourhood; I have had occasion to come here many a time. I did not know they kept open so late, but that light which you see proceeds from the front room of 'The Jolly Sailors.'"

"Is that the name of the house?"

"Yes; and that is all I know about it. I have noticed it as I passed, but I have never crossed its threshold."

A few steps sufficed to bring them to the doorway of the ancient hostelry.

The door was closed.

Jack knocked at it boldly.

Nearly five minutes elapsed before they heard the bolts withdrawn.

Then the door only opened to the extent of a few inches.

It was stopped by an iron chain.

"We are travellers needing rest and refreshment for an hour or so," replied Jack to the gruff interrogatory of "Who was there?"

The man at the door was apparently satisfied with the reply, for he let fall the chain, and allowed the door to open.

"We are obliged to be careful at night," he said, "for so many desperate characters are about."

"I suppose so," said Jack, "but you see, my friend here, who is a gentleman, has been set upon and maltreated by thieves, and is at the present moment almost dying from the effects of the ill-usage he has received."

The man looked suspiciously at Sir Marmaduke and Jack, and well he might. Their appearance was quite sufficient to make him do so.

But Sir Marmaduke himself stepped forward.

There was a grace and dignity about him, as with an effort he drew himself up to his full height, which was visible through his tattered dress and disfigured features.

"You have no just ground for suspicion," he said, "though I am free to admit that our appearance is more than sufficient to excite it. But we have suffered frightfully. I wish to make no secret of my name. It is Osborn—Sir Marmaduke Osborn of Farleigh Priory, Tilburyness."

The man, who was really the landlord of the "Jolly Sailors," looked for a moment the picture of incredulity, but was visibly impressed, both upon the countenance and manner of Sir Marmaduke, as well as in the tones of his voice, that it was not possible for him to mistake them.

"Walk this way, sir," he said, respectfully. "You shall have every attention while you are beneath my roof."

"Our stay must be a very short one. It is imperatively necessary for many and important reasons, that I should reach my home with the least possible delay. Can you tell me of any means by which I may go down the river?"

"I dare say it can be managed," said the landlord, "as he ushered them into a large room where several nautical-looking men were seated. "What would you like?"

"Some hot wine and water, with a slice of bread sopped in it," said Sir Marmaduke. "I dare not partake

of aught else. What will you have?" he added, turning to Jack.

"Anything you like."

"We have some cold beef," said the landlord.

"Bring that then," said Jack, "and a glass of hot brandy and water."

The landlord quitted the room to obey their orders.

The other occupants regarded Jack and his companion with the utmost surprise, but there was something in the countenance of the baronet that made it quite out of the question for them to offer him any rudeness.

The landlord returned with great expedition, and then Sir Marmaduke said—

"When I have eaten this, I should be glad if you would show us to a room where I can wash, myself, and bathe my wound. You see I have had a near touch."

"You have, indeed," said the landlord, obsequiously; "but you said something about starting to Tilbury."

"Yes. I wish to do so as soon as I am ready, which will be in less than an hour's time. Can you, do you think, find anyone to take us? Your guests here appear sailors by their dress."

"They are, but you must be aware it would be quite impossible to run such a distance as that."

"I know it. I want them to take me as far below bridge as they can, where doubtless I shall meet with some vessel which is about sailing down the river."

"If that is your intent, I think I can oblige you."

"How?"

"Four of the men here belong to a vessel that trades between London-bridge and Hamburg, where she is now at anchor. They intend to leave here at daybreak, and pull down the river, when they will at once set sail. The one you see nearest to the fireplace is the captain."

Sir Marmaduke and Jack looked in the direction indicated, and saw a man with a cheerful, good-tempered-looking countenance, complacently smoking a long clay pipe.

"Do you think," said the baronet, "that the offer of ten pounds would be sufficient to induce him to set off a few hours earlier than he intended and put me ashore at Tilbury?"

"I will call him here and ask him," said the landlord, "with your permission."

"Do so, do so."

The landlord beckoned with his finger, and the captain at once left his seat and came towards them.

The others looked on curiously, but the conversation had been carried on in too low a tone for them to hear a word of it.

"What cheer, messmate?" asked the captain.

"This gentleman and his companion," replied the landlord, "are very anxious to get down the river before daylight, and they want to know whether, in consideration of a ten-pound note, you would mind starting at once, and putting them ashore at Tilbrynness."

"Your honour's humble servant to command," he said, addressing himself to Sir Marmaduke. "I am ready and willing, too, for it is not often a sailor has a chance of making ten pounds."

"Very well then," replied the baronet, who had finished his bread and wine. "I am just going to wash the blood from my face and have my wound attended to, and then I shall be ready."

"All right, your honour. I'll be off at once. You'll find the boat at the bottom of the steps here. There may be one or two others, so when you get to the landing, call out, *Ringdore*—that's the name of my little craft, you must know—and we will reply at once."

Upon this understanding they separated.

It took Sir Marmaduke but a few minutes to make himself ready. The wound itself was scarcely worthy of the name, and all that was done to it was to sponge it clean with some warm water, and apply a little plaister.

This done, they, under the landlord's guidance, betook themselves to the landing-steps, which was situated just where St. Paul's pier is now.

The night was light, and when they turned the corner of the street in which stood "The Jolly Sailors," they could see the river, and the numerous boats at their moorings with great distinctness.

"*Ringdore*," said the landlord.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the reply. "Here you are!"

There were two boats at the bottom of the steps.

In one could be seen four dark forms.

Jack put a guinea into the landlord's hand, and then descending the steps, proceeded to assist his companion into the boat.

But while he was thus engaged he was startled by the sudden appearance of three other men, who made their way down the steps towards the other boat.

"Here you are, your honour; the best boat on the river, sir!"

"Curse you!" said a growling voice. Hold your row, and push off at once!"

"Jonathan Wild!" said Jack, as he sprang into the boat. "Row for your lives—row! Get free from him, and you shall have, not ten pounds, but fifty! Quick! Oh! quick, or we are lost!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JONATHAN WILD TURNS DOCTOR, AND UNDERGOES A LITTLE DISCIPLINE.

THE altogether unexpected appearance of Jonathan Wild was not, as Jack fancied, owing to his having traced them, but owing to a purely fortuitous circumstance.

To account for it, however, we must go back a little way.

It will be recollected that the last we saw of him was when, by one well-directed thrust, Jack prostrated him to the ground.

Two of his men at once stooped down and raised him to his feet, while the other two started off in pursuit of the fugitives.

But, as they had already turned the corner to the market, their prey was no longer in sight, nor was there anything to give them a clue as to the route they had taken.

Therefore they had to trust to chance entirely, and, as they fancied down the Old Bailey was the way they were likeliest to go, they set off in that direction at full speed.

Of course there search was resultless.

Full an hour elapsed before Jonathan recovered.

In fact, so death-like did he look, that Levee went out for an apothecary, who was in the habit of dressing Wild's wounds.

This man, whose name was Ebenezer Snoxall, lived at the corner of Skinner-street.

On his arrival, his first care was to dress Wild's wounds, before he attempted to revive him, for he knew how very violent he was apt to be.

He shook his head gravely and uttered such exclamations as "Hum! ha!" during the process.

At last Jonathan looked something like himself, so Mr. Snoxall held some pungent essence under his nostrils, which caused him to open his eyes at once.

He glared about him for some seconds, and clasped his hands over his head.

There was a horrible humming noise in that region, accompanied with the most splitting headache that could be conceived.

"Don't worry yourself, Mr. Wild," said the apothecary, in croaking accents peculiar to him. "You will require a long rest before you get over this. You will, indeed."

"Who are you?" roared Wild, springing up to a sitting posture.

"Murder!" said Mr. Snoxall, "murder!" Then he added, in defiance of grammar, "It's me—it's me."

The cloud about Jonathan's brain was gradually dispersing.

He remembered the voice of the apothecary.

He laid down again, and strove to think.

"Ha!" he cried, as he remembered what had taken place. "Blue—Blueskin, I say."

"He's not come in, if you please, Mr. Wild," said Levee, opening the door just wide enough to admit his head.

"Where's Sheppard and that—that old man with him. Caught and put back in their cells, of course. Ha! ha! they shall pay dearly for this prank."

Levee hesitated.

"What now, villain? Where are they?"

Jonathan's face assumed a bloodthirsty expression.

"Now pray don't excite yourself, Mr. Wild, pray don't," said the apothecary; "the consequences will be serious if you do. You will bring on brain fever."

"Silence," said Wild, as he carried his hand to his pistol.

"Yes, Mr. Wild, oh! yes," said Mr. Snoxall, precipitately retreating to the most distant corner in the room.

"Now, villain," yelled Wild, turning towards Levee, "why do you hesitate?"

"Hicks and Noble, if you please, Mr. Wild!"—

"Well?"

"They have pursued them."

"Ah!"

"But I don't know whether they have found them."

"Fifty pounds!—a hundred pounds for whoever brings them to me dead or alive! Do you hear that? a hundred pounds! a hundred pounds—pounds!"

Wild reeled and would have fallen to the floor had not Mr. Snoxall darted forward and saved him.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Wild, or I can't answer for the consequences. Calm yourself, Mr. Wild, I beg."

"Brandy!" roared Jonathan, recovering from the vertigo which had seized him; "brandy! brandy!"

"No, no, Mr. Wild," remonstrated the son of Galen; "no, no, it would be certain death to you to drink brandy."

"Am I master here? Brandy, I say. Ha! that is well."

Levee had taken from a cupboard in the room a bottle of brandy.

Jonathan took it with a smile of satisfaction, and placing it to his lips, drank off the greater portion of it. The apothecary stared aghast.

Wild drew a long breath, and then he said,—

"Fetch me some more clothes instantly, and a hat and wig."

Levee flew, rather than ran, to do his tyrannical master's bidding, and a few minutes after he had returned, Jonathan strode out into the hall, presenting something of his ordinary appearance.

But though he carried things off with a high hand, he was in reality suffering the most intolerable agony from the hurts he had received.

He had a purpose in view.

Just as he reached the hall the front door was opened, and the two men, Hicks and Noble, entered.

"Well?" said Wild.

"We can't find nothink of them, Mr. Wild."

"Curse you both! After them again. I wouldn't have them escape for a thousand pounds. Curses! You shall have a hundred a-piece if you bring them back, dead or alive."

"We're off, Mr. Wild."

"The two men were only too glad to avail themselves of this loop-hole to get out of the reach of his brutality. Wild's head pained him dreadfully.

A rather desperate remedy came into his mind.

"Levee," he said, in a milder tone than he had yet used. "Come with me. I want you."

Trembling in every limb, for he did not know what evil to apprehend from Wild's pacific demeanour, Levee followed him into the little yard at the back of the premises.

There was a pump here which supplied those in the house with water, and Jonathan walked straight up to it.

"Levee," he said, "I have had my head knocked about a good deal."

"You have, Mr. Wild."

"How do you know I have, villain?"

"Mr. Snoxall, if you please."

"Bah!"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Now, look here. If I put myself in his care, I shall be laid up for a month, so I am going to try a cure of my own."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"I am going to hold my head under the pump."

"The pump, Mr. Wild?" repeated Levee, incredulously.

"Yes, blockhead, and when I do, you begin to pump the water upon it. Very slowly at first, until at last you get up to full speed, and don't stop till I tell you to do so."

Levee walked to the pump in anything but an enviable frame of mind. He knew his master's vicious temper, and that there was every reason, if he valued his skin, to be particularly careful.

Jonathan put his head under the spout.

Levee began at first very gently, and gradually increased.

The pain which the falling water occasioned was so great that Jonathan almost uttered a shriek of pain, but he controlled that impulse. He knew that the result of the treatment he was undergoing would be a complete immunity from pain afterwards.

Jonathan kept his head under for five minutes good, and then he snatched it away and stood upright.

He was wonderfully better—well, indeed, in comparison to what he had been.

So well satisfied was he that he resolved to try the pump discipline a second time.

This time, of course, he did not feel it so much, and when he rose, with the exception of a kind of numbness, he felt that all pain had gone.

He returned to the hall.

"Send out all the men," said Wild, "in pursuit. I cannot go myself, because I have even more particular business under hand."

What that business was the reader will speedily learn.

It will be recollected that after Lord Ingestrie's interview with him that morning, another visitor had been announced.

What actually passed between them it is not necessary to relate. Its results will be seen in Wild's actions.

That it was no slight matter may be gathered from the fact of his abandoning the search for his two prisoners, and delegating that important matter to his subordinates.

The fearful punishment which he had received, too, was not sufficient to make him postpone its execution.

Jonathan Wild entered his office, and, going straight to his desk, unlocked it, and took out the blood-bedappled diamond tiara, which he had taken from the coffin of the bride.

The business then was in connection with that.

Hastily cramming it into his pocket, Wild left the office, and, after giving a few more orders, made his way into the street.

The continued absence of his lieutenant, Joseph Blake, or Blueskin, as he was called, puzzled and alarmed him. He knew not what to think of so extraordinary a circumstance.

Wild went to the corner of the Old Bailey, and looked about him for some conveyance.

A hackney-coach came blundering along.

He hailed it, and told the man to drive to the nearest stairs where he could get a boat.

"St. Paul's-stairs," said the jarvey, "ain't the nearest eggzactly, but you're more likelier to get a boat there than at Blackfriars."

"Drive to St. Paul's-stairs then, in the devil's name, and make haste about it."

The clumsy vehicle rumbled over the stones.

The swaying and jolting made Wild's head none the better, nor had his reflections a soothing effect upon him.

"Curse that Sheppard!" he said. "He's as bad as his father was before him. I can do no good with either. He'll come to the same end, that's clear. Curse him! He shall suffer for the pains I am enduring. Sir Marmaduke, too. Just as I had accomplished that which had given me so much trouble. To have it snatched from me. The paper, too. Oh! they would like that, of course. Curse them both. As sure as my name is Jonathan Wild they shall rue this day."

At this moment the coach stopped.

"Here's a public-house, sir, where the watermen waits. Shall I tell them there's a job?"

"Yes; and be quick."

The man entered the house, which was only two streets off the "Jolly Sailors," and found there two men, who went down to the landing steps with Wild in the manner we have recorded.

CHAPTER XLIX.

JACK SHEPPARD AND SIR MARMADUKE OSBORN GET OUT OF SIGHT OF JONATHAN WILD, BUT BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

AND so after all it appears that the presence of Jonathan Wild at St. Paul's-stairs was entirely owing to one of those cross accidents and chance coincidences which occasionally happen.

Had Jack Sheppard only have had sufficient mastery over himself to remain quite quiet, instead of shouting out in the way he did, it is probable enough they would have pushed off into the stream undetected.

But as it was Jonathan recognised the voice, as the roar of anger and astonishment he gave sufficiently evidenced.

"After those in that boat," he cried. "Keep them in sight, and you shall have fifty pounds reward! They are traitors to the state! and I am Jonathan Wild, the holder of a warrant for their apprehension."

"All right, sir," said the two watermen. "We'll do it, won't we, Bill?"

"In course we will. That fifty's as good as earned, sir, I can tell you."

"After uttering the shout he did, Jack sprang into the boat, and the men, animated by his words, at once pushed off, and urged by eight oars, sped over the waves at a frightful rate.

Sir Marmaduke Osborn, when he heard the voice of his implacable, and, as he at that moment thought, omnipresent enemy, fell back into the boat in a swoon.

A very few words from Jack to the captain sufficed to put the latter into full possession of the facts of the case.

There was no mistaking the truthful manner in which Sheppard spoke. It went direct to the captain's heart.

His whole sympathies were naturally attracted towards Sir Marmaduke, and he cried to his men—

"Row! row like devils! Get out of sight of those in the other boat. Cheerily, cheerily! You," he added to Jack, "had better see to your friend. He has fallen backwards in a swoon."

Stimulated by the large sum of money Jonathan had offered them to keep the other boat in sight, the two men made the most incredible exertions.

Wild, however, was clear-headed enough to see that anything in the shape of an attack just then would be madness.

All he could hope to do, and scarcely that, was not to lose sight of them, but follow in their wake wherever they might go.

He would then be able to set his men on the track.

Like two spectral vessels, in that dim and misty light, went the two boats; but gradually, Wild could see, despite the desperate efforts the two men who were rowing him made, that they were falling rapidly into the rear.

"On—on," he cried. "Keep them in sight, keep them in sight, and the money shall be yours—ay, double the amount! Can't you get assistance anywhere?"

"I fear not, sir," replied the waterman who was seated next to Wild. "We'll keep them in sight if such a thing is possible. We might be able to get them stopped at the bridge."

"Try—try! They are traitors both!"

London-bridge could now be seen lowering in the distance. All, however, was dark upon it. Not a single ray of light peeped forth.

"We shall lose them in the shadow of the bridge!" exclaimed Wild, as he saw the boat he was pursuing disappear in the obscurity. "It has gone!"

"All right, sir," said the waterman. "We shall come in sight of it again on the other side."

With this assurance Wild was obliged to rest content.

Fortunately the tide was running out, which made their progress all the easier and more rapid.

London-bridge was gained, and the boatmen shipping their oars, the boat darted through it with great velocity. Wild looked eagerly about him.

The mass of shipping in the pool confused his vision.

"Where is the boat?" he yelled. "Where is it? I cannot see it anywhere."

The waterman paused a moment, and glanced keenly ahead.

"Where is it, I say?" asked Wild, again, after the lapse of a few seconds. "Where is it?"

"Gone, sir; gone, as I'm a man!"

"A man!" said Wild, "a fool, an ass, an idiot, you mean."

"You'd best be civil, Mr. What's-your-name, or I'll slap me if I don't cast you overboard."

"Peace!" said Wild, mastering himself with a great effort. "Peace! They have doubtless got on board one of the many craft hereabouts, and if so all search after them will be useless. You shall be well paid for your night's

work. Row on, with all speed, to Wapping, as at first arranged."

Wild flung himself back in the boat as he spoke.

His mind was in such a state of turmoil as defies all attempts of description. Everything had gone wrong with him. What did it portend? He, who had hitherto succeeded always in what he undertook, to have every one of his projects thwarted. It was strange indeed.

The boat, propelled by the lusty strokes of the two oarsmen, glided swiftly onwards.

"Wapping, sir," said the boatmen. "Where will you land?"

"Nowhere. Put me on board that lugger there with her sails spread, and then wait. I shall want you to take me back."

"Ay—ay, sir," said the men.

"Boat ahoy!" cried a man on board the lugger.

"All right, coming on board."

A beam of light from a powerful lantern was now directed upon the boat. It fell upon the countenance of the villanous thief-taker, who was instantly recognised, and a rope thrown for him to ascend by.

It was not the first time by some hundreds that Wild had visited this boat, and he climbed on deck with more agility than one would have thought such an unwieldy man possessed.

As soon as he stood on board, Wild said, in a low tone, to the man who had hailed him—

"Where's the skipper?"

"In his berth, sir. Shall I tell him you want him?"

"Yes, and look sharp, for I have not a moment to spare."

"Very good, sir."

Wild strolled along the deck of the little vessel, and looked about him with a critical eye.

As the reader has no doubt already suspected, this was the boat Wild employed to carry over to Holland and Belgium such property as he could not dispose of in England.

In a few minutes Jonathan was joined by a stout, burly-looking man, who had huddled on some part of his apparel.

"What is it, Mr. Wild, what is it?"

"Oh! that's you, Schilder, is it? Here."

Schilder, who was the man in command of the lugger, walked by Wild's side to listen to his orders.

"Are you all ready to sail?"

"At any moment, Mr. Wild."

"Get ready, then, at once; you must be off."

"Is there danger?"

"There is; and it is all the greater since you ought to have started off hours ago."

"Indeed."

"Curses on them, I have been detained by two villains I had in custody. Never mind, they shall suffer for it. Here is a diamond tiara which you must dispose of."

"Good."

"Secrete it somewhere on board in case you should be overhauled, which I think more than likely."

"Yah! yah! Mr. Wild, trust me for that."

"Get a good price, Schilder."

"What is its value, Mr. Wild—actual value?"

"Over two thousand pounds."

"Der teufel."

"You must get as much as you can. It ought to realize something handsome. Above all, be careful, for there has been a devil of a row about it. One of the parties came to me this morning, and from what passed then I judged it to be most advisable to part with it at once."

"Very good, Mr. Wild. Have you any further instructions?"

"None, Schilder—none at all."

"Very good; then I am quite ready, and at your service."

"That is well."

"You don't seem very well, Mr. Wild."

"I'm not, Schilder; I'm not. I have had enough hard knocks to kill any ordinary man, but I am alive, you see—alive."

"Yes, Mr. Wild. But you seem to have quite lost your spirits."

"They shall suffer for it when I regain them. You understand, Schilder?"



[JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN ENCOUNTER JONATHAN WILD.]

"Precisely."
 "I intended to have freighted you with some more goods, but they must wait until next time. What have you for a cargo?"
 "Dutch cheeses, as usual."
 "Then mind. It is by no means certain, but I think there is a strong probability that you will be overhauled before you pass the Nore, so be prepared for such an event."
 "Do not fear, Mr. Wild. You can rest quite easy upon that score."
 "Be it so. You must take care not to excite suspicion by delaying to bring-to if you are signalled."
 "I will attend to all that, Mr. Wild. You need not trouble at all."
 "I am anxious."
 "I know you are, but you can depend upon my taking it to the best market, and getting a good price for it."
 "Then I will go, Schilder."
 "Shall I put you ashore, Mr. Wild?"

"No, I have a boat waiting for me."
 "Very good."
 The skipper assisted Jonathan into the little wherry. The two men, who had had long enough rest to recover from their fatigue, cast off, and rowed swiftly. But ere they were a hundred yards from the lugger, another boat shot out into the stream, and a voice cried—
 "Pull up there, and let us come alongside. We command you in the king's name!"
 Wild looked behind him, and saw a dark figure standing up in the boat.
 "The Thames police," he muttered. "I would not have them know of my visit to the lugger for the world."
 Then turning to the two watermen, who had naturally, upon hearing such a command, shipped their oars, he cried—
 "Row for your lives. Those are not the police, but pirates. They fancy, no doubt, I carry a rich booty. Row—row, and you shall have your own price."

CHAPTER L.

JONATHAN WILD HAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM THE PISTOLS OF THE THAMES POLICE.

"Ay—ay! sir, that's your sort!" responded the watermen. "Pull away, Bill; we shall make a good night's work of this."

"You will," said Wild, "if you will only take care what you are doing. Don't allow yourself to be overhauled by them."

"Oh! trust to us, your honour."

Wild shook his head.

"You said that when you were in chase of the other boat, and now where is it?"

The men were silent.

But they pulled all the harder at the oars.

"Stop your boat," said the voice again; "stop your boat, in the king's name! The Thames police want to come alongside of you!"

"On! on!" said Wild. "On! on!"

"Once more, like some huge cloud of vapour, old London Bridge came in sight.

The tide was now just at the turn, which made the passage of the arches a matter of no small difficulty, unless they went slowly and carefully through.

But Jonathan would not suffer the men to relax their speed.

It was running a risk, but he felt that doing so was giving him a chance of escape from his pursuers.

The boat shot under the arch with great velocity.

But just as it reached the piers a cross eddy caught it, and before the watermen were aware even of the circumstance, dashed the boat against the stonework.

A curse came from the lips of all three at this accident.

The pursuing boat gained on them, for it was full two minutes after they fouled before they could get clear.

Then one of the watermen standing up in the boat pushed them off.

At this moment those in the boat behind cried to them to surrender, and the one who stood in the prow fired a pistol.

In the darkness, however, it was without effect.

Jonathan crouched himself into the stern of the boat, which now being disengaged was propelled with great rapidity over the smooth water above bridge.

But the Thames police, for such they were, found the conduct of those on board of the boat full of suspicion.

They had seen them leave in a hurried manner one of the moored vessels.

At that time robberies from boats at anchor in the river were of constant occurrence. Indeed, to such an extent were the depredations carried, that a special body of police was organized, whose duty it was to scrutinize all craft upon the river that presented a suspicious appearance.

They had challenged Wild's boat, and the circumstance of no notice whatever being taken, seemed to show that this time their suspicions were well grounded.

Having been recently set about the work, they were anxious to show, if they had an opportunity, their efficiency, and this was an excellent chance.

Of course, if Wild had chosen to avow who he was, that would have been sufficient, but he was especially desirous to keep secret, if possible, his presence on the river on that particular night.

In the contingency of suspicion being in any way directed against him, it would be well to make out that he had received such injuries as to make it a matter of impossibility for him to go abroad.

A keen wind swept over the surface of the river, but Jonathan felt grateful for it; it cooled the feverish excitement of his brain.

The distance between the boats was now about the same as it was in the outset, though the probabilities were all against Jonathan maintaining it much longer.

"Get closer to the shore," he said, "so as to run in suddenly, and land me. I will make off, and you can tell them that you rowed in by my orders; say I said they were pirates in pursuit."

Pirates was the term applied to those who plundered the craft upon the river.

"Ay, ay, sir. We'll manage that. Where would you land?"

"Anywhere. It does not matter in the least, so that I

get a few minutes' start of the rascals in that other boat."

"It's like their infernal impudence to cry out that they are the Thames police."

"That is the device they use, and a good one it is to get vessels to allow them to come alongside, and then they board them without difficulty."

The police-galley kept very pertinaciously in their rear.

"Have you a spare oar?" asked Wild, as he glanced behind him, and saw how close his pursuers were upon him. "If you have, give it to me, and I will help."

"We haven't one, sir. You get ready to spring ashore. We shall land you directly."

During the last few moments, the watermen had been directing the course of the boat obliquely towards the bank.

At last, with a sudden rush they reached the spot whence they had set out, namely, St. Paul's-steps.

"You will find ample payment for your night's work on the seat of the boat," said Wild, as he sprang on to the slippery stairs, and in a moment disappeared in the darkness of the night.

"Tim," said one of the watermen.

"Yes, mate."

"This is a precious rum start, isn't it?"

"It is."

"I can't make it out at all. Is the money on the seat?"

"Yes, here it is. A good heavy purse, too."

"So much the better. Now, mate, here comes the police-galley, for police-galley it is, in spite of all Mr. Wild's nonsense about their being pirates. What shall we say?"

"I don't know, I leaves it to you."

"Very well. Then I say don't make an enemy of Jonathan Wild, because if you do he is pretty sure to get you hung at Tyburn before you are many weeks older."

"Oh, lor!"

"Now we have been well paid, and we had better be content and keep his secret. He did not want them to know he was on the water to-night, and we won't say nothing about it."

"Boat there!" cried a loud voice.

"Ay, ay."

There was a grating noise as the police-galley came alongside.

A bull's-eye lantern was unmasked, and its beams directed upon the wherry.

"Who are you?"

"Watermen, your honour."

"Where's your badge?"

"Here."

"Oh! that's all right. Now, why didn't you heave-to when we called to you?"

"Because our fare told us you were river pirates, after him."

"Pshaw! and you believed him?"

"Of course we believed the gemman; didn't we Tim?"

"In course."

"Well, harkye, my fine fellows; I'm superintendent of the Thames police, and I have got your badge. Now, if anything turns out to have taken place on the river to-night, you will have to answer for it. Push off."

The police-galley shot out again into the river.

"I'm blest," said Tim, "if you ain't put us in for a good thing."

"What do you mean?"

"We shall be transported, that's certain."

"Not a bit of it."

"Well, you see."

"No we are in no danger, let what will happen, for, don't you see, Jonathan Wild will be sure to get us off to prevent our saying anything about his being on the river to-night."

"Oh! ah! I see."

"We're quite safe, and now let us go back to the 'Commodore's Head,' and have a drop o' summit hot and strong."

Jonathan, when he sprang upon the steps, made his way as quickly as he could through the mass of streets between the river and Ludgate-hill.

But in a very few moments, on finding himself unpur-

sued, he abated his speed, and shaped his course for Newgate-street.

Muttering the most diabolical curses, he made his way along the Old Bailey.

"He shall hang!" he said, and he clenched his fists tightly as he spoke; "he shall hang, curse him! Does he think it nothing to cross me in my schemes? He shall rue what he has done, most bitterly rue it! Blueskin, too—my most faithful follower—he has weaned him from me! His absence looks suspicious, too. He must be disposed of; not by the rope, though. He knows too much. He must be put out of the way quietly!"

It was wonderful how coolly Jonathan looked at taking away a life. He spoke of it, and resolved upon it, as the most commonplace thing in the world. For the credit of humanity be it said, there have been few men so bad as Jonathan Wild.

He turned the corner into Newgate-street, and in a few minutes reached his own door. In obedience to long habit he put his hand into the breast of his waistcoat for his master key, and then he recollected Jack Sheppard had taken it from him.

The volley of oaths that came from his lips was something awful, and seizing the heavy knocker in his hand, he brought it down with such violence as almost to split the panel.

"What do you —?" said a voice fiercely, as the door was flung open; then when he saw who it was that had demanded admission, his behaviour underwent a remarkable change, and he added, "Oh! Mr. Wild, is it you, sir?"

CHAPTER LI.

JACK SHEPPARD AND LADY OSBORN SUSTAIN AN IRREPARABLE LOSS.

LEAVING Jonathan Wild to the perpetration of fresh iniquities in his gloomy domicile, we will now, for a short space, follow the fortunes of Jack Sheppard and Sir Marmaduke Osborn.

As the thief-taker had more than suspected, the boat, as soon as it passed under the arches of the bridge, stopped at the side of one of the vessels at anchor there.

That vessel was the *Ringdove*.

The men assisted the two fugitives on board.

Sir Marmaduke was still insensible. The efforts which Jack had made to revive him had proved of no avail.

The *Ringdove* was one of the largest of the vessels that traded between London and Hamburg. She was now all ready for performing the return voyage.

The captain caught Jack by the arm, and pointed across the water.

"Look," he said, "there is your foe."

"I see him."

"He has lost us, and is baffled to know how and where we have disappeared."

"The man is a perfect mystery to me," said Jack. "I have knocked him about enough to kill half-a-dozen ordinary men, yet there he is, looking as though nothing in the world was the matter with him."

The captain then gave orders to get the vessel under weigh, and in less than half-an-hour afterwards she was gliding slowly down the Thames.

Upon further examination they found that Sir Marmaduke had struck his head violently against some projection in the boat.

Between them, Jack and the captain brought him back to life.

But when he recovered he was so frightfully exhausted that he could scarcely lift his hand.

As they approached their destination he grew worse and worse.

The reaction which Jack foretold had come.

Moving at the rate they did, it was a long time before the vessel reached Tilburyness. Jack's impatience knew no bounds. She whom he loved had an enemy in Jonathan Wild, in addition to her villainous uncle.

Even at that very moment she might be suffering the greatest peril from their machinations. The bare probability almost maddened him, and his spirit chafed within him as he watched the sluggish progress of the vessel through the water.

Abandon Sir Marmaduke until he had seen him safely

restored to his family he would not. He felt that to act otherwise would be base in the extreme.

But, as all things must of necessity have an end, so at last did the journey, and Jack was delighted beyond measure when the captain showed him in the distance the place for which he was bound.

It was now morning. The sun was high up in the sky, and shining brightly, making the wavelets on the river sparkle like diamonds.

Sir Marmaduke was brought on deck. His eye brightened, and he said, faintly—

"At last! Once more I see you, my own happy home! Oh! my young friend, my heart overflows with gratitude for the manifold services you have rendered me. Look among those trees: can you see the roof-tops of a mansion there?"

"Quite plainly."

"That, then, is Farleigh Priory."

"Your home?"

"My home and yours, too, Jack, if you will but share it with me."

"You are too kind and generous to me," said Jack. "You have not heard the story of my life; nor will there be time for me to tell it. However, there are circumstances which will compel me—at least at present—to decline your offer."

"But?"

"It concerns another. One like you, persecuted by her foes, but not so well able to do battle with them."

"A girl?"

"Yes; and one in whose welfare I feel the deepest interest."

"Well—well; you have a brave heart. I have already had proof of that. Nothing would be further from my purpose than to attempt to curb your inclination in any way. All I can say is, while I live, so long will you find a friend, and so long as a roof shelters me, so long will you be welcome to share it."

Jack Sheppard pressed the hand of the baronet in silence.

After a brief pause he spoke.

"Let us turn our attention to your own affairs," he said. "They require some consideration. What shall you do when you land?"

"Do? Go home."

"But you forget. You are not strong enough to walk. Besides, what effect may not your sudden and unexpected appearance have upon your wife?"

"True. I had forgotten. What do you advise?"

"If there is any house close to the shore, where you can remain for a time, I think you had better do so. I will then go on to the Priory, and prepare your wife for the surprise awaiting her."

"Thanks—thanks. There is a poor boatman's cottage a little lower down, the inmates of which are known to me. I will stop there, and you—you will —"

"I will go to the Priory, as I said."

"You can bring the carriage."

"I will."

"And now about the payment of the captain?"

"If you will permit me," said Jack, who had been furnished with money by Blueskin during their stay at the "Ship and Rainbow," in the Horseterry; "if you will permit me, I will see to that."

"I shall then be under another obligation to you, and one which I can easily repay."

Jack upon this spoke to the captain, and gave him the sum he had been promised, at the same time requesting him to put them ashore as near the boatman's cottage as he could, which was now only a few yards in advance.

This was done, and the baronet was assisted into the rude dwelling-place by some of the crew.

Having seen all perfectly safe, Jack proceeded to carry out his intention of visiting the Priory.

He needed no guide, for the upper portion of the mansion could be seen quite plainly; besides which, the lane, after winding through a copse, terminated at the entrance gates.

Every step Jack took filled him with delight. Brought up all his life in the midst of London, it is no wonder he should keenly appreciate the beauties of the country.

The lodge-gates were closed, and he was firmly refused admittance until he told the man that he was the bearer

of intelligence of the safety of Sir Marmaduke to Lady Osborn.

Then they were flung open in all haste.

"He is alive! my poor master?" said the lodge-keeper, in a voice of emotion. "God bless him! there has been a sad house ever since he disappeared more than a month ago. We all feared he was dead."

With such like expressions he accompanied Jack to the Priory, which had a dismal look. The shutters of the windows on the ground floor were closed, and the blinds of the upper ones drawn down.

It was into a plainly-furnished room that Jack was ushered, and there he awaited the arrival of the Lady Osborn.

The intelligence that some one wished to see her who brought news of her husband filled her with agitation.

There was a flush of colour in her habitually pale face, and a sparkle in her eyes when she entered.

She paused, and strove to speak, but her voice failed her, and she was fain to clutch a chair for support.

"Calm yourself, madam," said Jack, respectfully. "I am not, thank heaven! the bearer of ill tidings. He still lives, and is waiting to see you."

Lady Osborn, at this confirmation of the good news she had heard, could not restrain her tears, and she sank down upon the chair, the back of which she had grasped.

"Oh! why—why did he not come to me at once? Oh! this is cruel in the extreme."

"Not so, madam; he feared the effect his sudden and unexpected appearance might have upon you. When you are composed and ready, I will take you to him."

"Oh! I am quite ready—and—quite composed. Take me, oh! take me, without delay."

"You are, by his instructions, to take the carriage."

"The carriage! Where is it, then?"

"Close at hand, madam."

"Why, then—Oh! he is hurt?" she said, a wild feeling of alarm thronging to her heart. "You did not tell me that. Where has he been to? Oh! I have so much to ask that I forget!"

"You must subdue your emotions, lady."

"I will try," she said.

As she spoke she rang the bell.

"Tell Price to put the horses in the carriage at once; I am waiting to go out."

"Yes, my lady."

"And now, sir," she continued, fixing her eyes imploringly upon Jack's face. "Tell me—oh! tell me more!"

"You must prepare yourself for evil tidings," said Jack. "He has suffered much since you saw him last. He was kidnapped by a villain, and kept in a dungeon, deprived of light and sustenance. But he has escaped, after many difficulties and much fatigue. From his own lips must you learn the story of his sufferings. He can relate them much better than I can. You must not expect to see him looking as he did when you saw him last. His sufferings have left their impress on him. Still he is alive, and, with the exception of being utterly exhausted, well!"

"Thank heaven! then," said Lady Osborn, "for I had lost all hope. Oh! sir, if, as I suspect, it is to you I owe the restoration of my husband, accept my warmest, my most heartfelt thanks! May God reward you, for I cannot!"

Strange to say, these words were distasteful to Jack. The reason was because his own heart told him how unworthy he was of such encomiums.

But he was relieved from his embarrassment by hearing the carriage draw up before the door.

Lady Osborn sprang excitedly to her feet.

"Come, come!" she said, "the carriage is at the door. Oh! have pity on me, and take me to him at once."

She took Jack by the hand, and led him across the room.

"Let me beg of you," he said, "to control yourself. I ask it no less for your own sake than that of your husband's."

"I shall be calm if you will take me to him, indeed I shall."

There was a very grave doubt as to whether this would be the case; but Jack, fearing to increase her excitement, thought the best thing he could do was to comply.

He therefore handed her into the carriage, and gave the coachman instructions where to drive.

She would insist upon his entering the carriage with her.

Jack felt awkward and uncomfortable.

It was the first time he had ever been in a carriage.

However, the demeanour of the baronet's wife soon put him at his ease.

The distance between the Priory and the boatman's cottage was soon accomplished.

On the way Jack did his utmost to soothe the mind of the unfortunate lady, as well as to prepare her for the sad spectacle her husband presented.

They drew up about a hundred yards from the cottage, and then both alighted.

Lady Osborn took Jack's arm, and they together walked towards the hut.

It was a strange position for Jack.

He could see the lady's agitation was extreme. She drew her breath painfully, and her face became alternately white and scarlet.

They reached the door.

Whispering a last injunction to her to be firm, he lifted the latch.

With a cry of joy she sprang into the cottage.

Sir Marmaduke had been accommodated with a patriarchal arm-chair by the fireside.

Despite his weakness he rose from his chair, and staggering forward, was caught in the arms of his wife.

"At last," she said. "At last. How you must have suffered. My poor—poor husband. Look up! look up! Smile upon me as you always did. Husband! husband! Speak—look—or I shall go mad. Oh! he is dying!" she shrieked. "He is dying! Help! help! He is dying!"

Jack rushed forward.

But one glance at the pale features was sufficient.

Sir Marmaduke Osborn was dead!

CHAPTER LII.

THE CUP OF BLISS IS DASHED FROM JACK'S LIPS BY
WILD'S MYRMIDONS.

KEEPING close in the shadow of the houses—shrinking as much as possible from observation—glancing around uneasily—a dark form at dusk, that evening, glided along Drury-lane.

Near the low, old-fashioned doorway of the "Black Lion" Inn it paused, and assured, apparently, that it was unwatched, disappeared into the interior.

That form was Jack Sheppard.

After the sudden death of Sir Marmaduke Osborn, feeling that his presence was no longer required—that it could neither be of service to himself nor to the baronet—he spoke a few words of consolation, regret, and explanation to the bereaved lady, and then departed.

He was full of anxiety to know whether Edgworth Bess was in safety. From experience, he knew how much to be dreaded was Jonathan Wild, and he trembled at the thought, that then, at that very moment, she might be in his clutches, or, at least, in such a position as to need the assistance of a manly arm.

Such a feeling as this, as the reader may suppose, was just the one to make Jack hasten back to London; but, although it was not much past noon when he began his backward journey, yet, as we have seen, it was dark before he reached his destination.

Travelling in those days was a far different thing to what it is now, but it was all the better for Jack that night had come when he entered the city.

The whole of the way he proceeded with the utmost caution. He knew, in all probability, that Jonathan had spies posted in different places to watch for him, and he was extremely anxious that none of them should track him to the place where the young girl had found a refuge.

And so, like some malefactor just escaped from the precincts of a prison, he crept along Drury-lane, and then, watching his opportunity, disappeared through the doorway of the old inn.

His heart beat strangely, and his limbs trembled, as he walked along the dark, narrow passage towards the kitchen.

He entered hastily, and glanced about him.

It was vacant.

At least, such was his momentary impression, and then he heard a low and musical voice pronounce his name.

The revulsion of feeling that took place in his bosom almost overpowered him, when, turning round, he saw seated in the dark corner near the fireplace the object of his uneasiness.

She rose to her feet, and Jack, animated by an impulse which he could not control, sprang forward and clasped her to his breast.

For a few seconds he forgot everything except the fair young creature in such close contact with him; but then reflection came back, and he was almost terrified at what he had done.

Full of confusion, he strove to release himself, and would have done so had not his companion clung to him and prevented him.

She looked up into his face with some surprise.

"Oh! Jack," she said, "I am so glad you have come, for I feel safe now—quite safe. While you have been away so long I have been full of terrors, and I have started at the slightest sound; but now you are here I feel quite brave, because I know you can protect me."

As these words fell upon his ear, as he saw her countenance full of love, and her eyes, half-filled with tears, upturned towards his own, as he felt the soft pressure of his arms about his neck, Jack, for the first time in his life, was conscious of the reality of happiness.

And let not the reader be surprised that she should thus unreservedly exhibit her affection. She acted merely as nature prompted her; she had learned none of those artificialities existing in society; she saw in Jack one who, at the risk of his own life, had protected her from harm—had rescued her from death, which is ever a grim phantom to the young, and she sought not to conceal the pleasure which she felt in his society, because she knew no reason why she should. Hers, too, was one of those natures which demand something to love. All her life she had pined to find some outlet for her affection, but, until she met Jack, vainly. Is it wonderful, then, that having found an object, she poured forth all her love upon it, and that, too, without the least concealment or reserve.

As for Jack, he no more than anyone else could help loving her. One glance into her face was sufficient for that, without the confiding reliance she displayed in his ability to protect her from all harm—a feeling which more endears a man to a woman than any other.

Yes, Jack was happy, as many another has been under similar circumstances, and as many another will be.

It was Edgworth Bess—for it is by that name we shall call her—who first broke the silence. If she had not, there is no knowing how long it would have continued.

"Sit down, Jack," she said. "Sit down! I want you to tell me all that has taken place during your long absence."

These words aroused Jack from his abstraction.

He suffered himself unresistingly to be led to the seat Edgworth Bess had occupied when he entered the room.

The only light there was in the kitchen proceeded from the ruddy blaze of the fire, which, while it illumined several portions perfectly, yet left others in a shadow which, by contrast, seemed darker than it really was.

Perhaps the most obscure spot of all was where the lovers were now seated, and anyone entering the room would certainly not see them at a cursory glance.

Jack, who was emboldened by the behaviour of his companion, which was too unequivocal to admit a doubt that she loved him, passed his left arm round her waist and drew her towards him until her head reclined upon his shoulder.

"And what has alarmed you?" he asked in a whisper. "You must tell me all that has taken place."

"Nothing! I mean I have only felt in dread of something, without having any cause for doing so. I was anxious to know that you were in no danger."

Jack's face approached yet closer to his companion.

"Oh! Jack," she said, speaking very gravely—very earnestly, "I am full of alarm when you are away! Do, for my sake, abandon your present mode of life and those men you have consorted with. In the end, it can only bring trouble and despair. For my sake alter, and leave Jonathan Wild."

These words, from the young girl, though very gently uttered, dispersed Jack's happiness. They reminded him

of what he was and what the young girl was! He felt in a moment how enormous was the injury he should do her—that she was not made for such as he was. Under these circumstances, his better nature told him that his duty was not to encourage, but to reason the poor girl out of the affection she had formed for him. Although brought up under similar circumstances to himself, yet her rank in life was far above his, and he could feel how base it would be to take advantage of her gratitude.

These and many thoughts of a like character passed through Jack's mind with inconceivable rapidity. A struggle which was none the less severe from the shortness of its duration took place in his bosom, but in the end, despite the overwhelming passion which he felt, duty conquered, and, slowly removing his arm from its position, he raised her head and drew back further on the seat.

Edgworth Bess looked at him with surprise and grief, and then, in a tearful voice, she said—mistaking entirely the motive which had caused Jack to act as he did—

"Do not be offended with me for asking you what I have—pray do not. I would not offend you for the world. If I have done so, forgive me and forget it, for I spoke only what I thought."

By a great effort Jack spoke, but his voice was husky and constrained—

"No, no," he said; "you have not offended me. Indeed you have not. How could I be offended with you for asking what you have?"

"Then—then," she replied, creeping closer to him, and taking both his hands, "tell me what it is. Do you no longer love me?"

"No one but myself can tell you the extent of it, but—"

"But what?"

"I forgot, and so have you forgotten, the difference there is between us."

"Difference?"

"Yes, difference. I should be base-hearted in the extreme to take advantage of your gratitude and win your love. Do you remember who you are? You have by right, if not possession, rank, riches, and estates, while I—I—I am—no matter what I am—unfit, at any rate, for you."

A sob came from the lips of Edgworth Bess as he spoke these words, and his heart smote him for having caused her pain; but he controlled himself, with a great effort, and went on—

"I have done wrong," he said, "already, but there is yet time to retract. That I love you is unfortunately too true, but it is not a selfish love. The object of my life shall be to overthrow the designs of those who have so long deprived you of that which you ought to have. I will restore you to your rights. You will then occupy a position among the greatest of the land. All I shall require or wish for in return will be a grateful thought—and that, too, is all I shall accept. When the time comes you will see that I have acted right, and think all the better of me for it. Besides, I would fain believe the feeling you have for me is merely gratitude, not love. Is it not so?"

"You know it is not, Jack. I do love you—always shall love you! As for my rights, I have never known luxury, and therefore cannot feel its loss. I am content to leave what I possess in the hands of those who have been so long accustomed to them, and who will feel more sorrow at being deprived of them than I shall joy in regaining them."

Jack shook his head.

"That is false reasoning," he said. "You would be doing wrong not to strive to get your due. And you shall have it. But then suppose I suffered you to love me! What would be said? That I had acted merely from the most sordid motives. That I had entrapped your young affections; in fact, that I had been selfish, and that is a fault of which I have never yet been guilty, and it is one which, however bad I may have been, I should never like to have imputed to me."

"Every word you utter, Jack," whispered Bess, gently, after a brief pause, "makes me love you all the more. Do not cause me needless unhappiness. You own you love me, or I should not speak as I do. Do not let any feeling or anything others may say stand between us. I at least

shall know it is untrue. Come, Jack, promise me that you will think no more of this."

The temptation was strong. He loved, he was loved in return; but, nevertheless, even that could not blind him to the fact that a union between them could not fail to be productive of disastrous and unhappy consequences to her.

But he had not strength to trample on his love, or to withstand her pleadings. He did not yield, but made a compromise.

"Let it stay," he said, "until you are placed in the position you ought to occupy. In the meantime, we will be friends only. If afterwards, when you have become fully accustomed to your change of station, you find your feelings have undergone no change."

"They will undergo no change, Jack. I am sure they will not. Do not shake your head. Nothing will make me alter. All I ask is that you will quit your dreadful mode of life, that you will leave Jonathan Wild."

"I can readily promise that," said Jack. "I have, because I would not take part with him against you, made him my enemy. He confined me in a dungeon, but you see I have escaped."

"And you have done this for me, Jack," she said, and she clasped her arms about him. "Everything I hear makes me love you more."

Could Jack resist? He held out his arms, and pressed her to his bosom with a fervid embrace, and kissed the beautiful face so near his own.

But his bliss was doomed to be abruptly ended, for there was a sound of hasty footsteps in the passage, the door was flung open, and several men in the garb of police-officers rushed in.

CHAPTER LIII.

BLUESKIN APPEARS MOST OPPORTUNELY UPON THE SCENE OF ACTION.

EDGORTH BESS uttered a scream of terror.

Jack sprang to his feet, and plunging his hand into his pocket drew forth a pistol.

"There they are! there they are!" cried one of the men, who Jack saw was a member of Jonathan's gang. "There they are! Capture them!"

Bess clung to Jack. She was terrified, but yet she felt safe.

Jack Sheppard cocked his pistol, and presenting it, he said, in tones that left behind no doubt as to his sincerity—"The first one that comes forward has this bullet through his skull. You may capture me, but if you do it will not be until one at least of you bite the dust. Which is the one willing to die in order that I may be taken prisoner?"

"Come, come, Sheppard," said the officer who had before spoken. "Give in quietly like a sensible fellow. You can't escape, so you may as well save all disturbance. We have orders to take you and the young woman alive, and we mean to do it."

"Come on, then, and try," said Jack. "I will fight to the last."

"Forward, then," cried the officer. "We'll soon stop his crowing."

"Hold!" cried a voice at this moment, in such stentorian tones that every one fairly jumped again. "Hold, I say. What is the meaning of all this?"

"Saved!" whispered Jack to his companion. "Saved! saved!"

The voice came from the passage, and now a tall figure, with a drawn hanger in his hand, strode into the centre of the room, taking up a position between Jack Sheppard and Edgorth Bess and their assailants.

It was Blueskin.

Of course he was immediately recognised by all present.

His arrival was most opportune.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried. "Do you know who you are attacking? This is one of Mr. Wild's new hands."

"I don't care what he is," said Levee, for he the officer who had spoken was. "I don't care who he is, nor who she is either, but my orders from Mr. Wild himself were to take them both prisoners, unhurt if possible, and convey them to his house."

"Impossible. There is some mistake. Begone at once!"

"But"

"Do you hesitate?" roared Blake, threateningly; "do you hesitate? If you do, it will be the worse for you. You are under my orders, recollect; I tell you to be gone."

"But I have special orders from"—

"Are not your orders to obey me in the absence of Jonathan Wild? Answer me that. Are not those your instructions?"

"Yes, but"—

"Then go at once, or it will be the worse for you. I tell you there is some mistake; but whether there is or not I will be responsible for the whole transaction. You can go back to Newgate-street and say so."

"Mr. Blake," said Levee, who dared not set Blueskin's authority at defiance, since the standing orders were that in the absence of Wild he should be implicitly obeyed, "you don't"—

"I say will you obey or not? I tell you I will take all the responsibility. That ought to be enough, surely."

Levee could not say anything further against this, so he, with manifest reluctance, took his departure.

He went right out into the street, followed by his men, and then he stopped to think.

"What am I to do, I should like to know? I dare not go back, even though Blake does order me. Let me see; he has been away; this young Sheppard is a pal of his—he knows nothing about the row there's been. Of course, that's it; now I shall know how to act. Giles!"

One of the men stepped forward.

"You have seen what has taken place?"

"Yes."

"Run, then, at once to Newgate-street, and inform Mr. Wild. Tell him I could not refuse obedience, and that I am here on the watch. They won't escape. I dare say he will come back with you."

Giles started off at full speed, and then Levee very cunningly disposed his men close at hand, and took up a position himself just opposite the door of the "Black Lion," where he determined to wait and watch the course of events.

Having so far explained matters, we will leave him, and return to the kitchen where our friends were.

"I know all," said Blueskin, "so you need not waste time telling me. I will explain my absence when there is an opportunity."

"You arrived just in time."

"Fear nothing, we shall escape!"

"But Wild?"

"I quite agree with all you have done! Let that suffice! We have parted!"

"You and Jonathan?"

"Yes!"

"Hurrah! You have told him so?"

"Not yet! He will soon find it out in my actions. But we have no time to lose, if we wish to save our necks. Levee must have received very positive orders, and you may depend he is watching outside, while he has sent off to Wild."

"How, then, shall we escape?"

"Trust to me. There is no time for explanations. Be content to place yourself entirely under my orders, and then all will be well."

"I am willing! Cheer up, Bess! Do not fear!"

"I am not afraid," she replied, clinging more tightly to his arm.

"That's right."

"Johnson!" shouted Blueskin. "Johnson!"

"Here you are! What is it?"

"Go to the door, and see who there is about."

"All right!"

Johnson was only gone about a couple of minutes and then he returned.

"I don't see anyone; but you may depend they are only hiding."

"That's my impression. Now, I am going to try your friendship. I have quarrelled with Jonathan Wild."

"Blessed if I didn't think as much."

"He will be here shortly with an overwhelming force. We cannot go out into the lane, but we must leave this place. How will you manage it?"

"There is no back-way to the house."

"But, do you mean to say you have no other means of leaving the house than by the front door?"

Johnson looked around him, and then said in a whisper—

"I have; but it is a secret."

"All the better; we will keep it! I cannot stay to tell you all that has occurred, but I will do so. We must leave this place at once. Every minute that we stay adds frightfully to our danger."

"Then come on, M^r. Blake. Are you going to take Bess with you?"

"Yes; this is no longer a refuge for her, and she must be kept in safety."

"Well, I am very sorry that she's going, that's all. Bless her! She seems like one of my own."

"Yes, yes," said Blueskin, impatiently. "Which way are we to get out?"

"Follow me, and I will show you. Stop a minute, though, I must get a light."

Johnson provided himself with a lamp, and, having lit it, led them into the bar.

He closed the door carefully.

"I am going to put you in possession of one of the secrets of the old 'Black Lion.'"

As he spoke he opened a door on the opposite side, which led apparently to the cellars.

"Down there?"

"Yes. You go first, and I will hold the light and shut the door."

"Very good."

Still holding his hanger in his grasp, for he had not sheathed it, Blueskin went first down the cellar steps.

Jack and Edgworth Bess followed, and then Johnson, the landlord, who closed the door, as he said he should.

The steps were only twelve in number, so the bottom was soon reached, and here the three fugitives paused for Johnson to take the lead.

The cellar branched off to the right and left.

Johnson turned to the left, holding the light above his head, so that those who were following might see their way.

This was highly necessary, for the roof was low in many places, which was owing to the peculiar manner in which it was built.

It was of tolerable size, and ranged round the walls were several barrels, some erect and some lying down.

Johnson paused before one of the former, saying—

"Take hold of the lamp a minute, Blueskin, while I move this cask."

Then, as Blueskin obeyed, and he had both hands at liberty, he moved the cask from its position, and from the ease with which he did it, it was pretty clear it was empty.

He stooped down over the place from which he had moved the cask—or rather butt, for such it was—and caught hold of a ring in a stone slab, which opened after the fashion of a door.

Blueskin was surprised at this.

Beneath this trap-door could be seen a rather precipitous flight of steps.

"There you are, Mr. Blake. You didn't know of this neat little arrangement, did you?"

"I certainly did not, and I am much astonished."

"They would be sometime before they found that out, I rather think."

"So do I. Where does it lead?"

"I was just going to tell you. At the bottom of these steps you will find a narrow passage. Continue along it until you come to another flight of steps like these. Ascend them. You will find at the top a flat stone slab like this. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. Go on."

"Close to where this slab, then, fits into its setting, and on the right-hand side of the wall, you will see a small hole about the size of your finger. Put your mouth over it, and blow a good long, steady blast, and wait. In a few minutes the trap above your head will be raised."

"And then where shall we be?"

"Do you know White Hart-street?"

"Yes, it is the first turning to the left when you go out of your front door."

"Exactly. Well, do you happen to know a little public-house there, called the 'Fountain'?"

"Quite well."

"Then you know that, although my name is not up

over the door, yet that house belongs to me, and the man who keeps it is put there by me."

Blueskin nodded.

"He will open the trap, and let you out. He will say nothing, but show you the way to the upper regions. Then, if you will take my advice, you will be off as soon as possible."

"Capital, Johnson, capital! This is more than I expected. We shall get off all right. Good-bye, old fellow. Wild is sure to be savage, but he can't do anything to you."

"All right. Be quick with you. You have no time to lose."

The three fugitives hastily descended.

"You must take the lamp, or you will not be able to find your way. I can easily get out of the cellar in the dark."

As he spoke, Johnson handed Jack the lamp, and then replaced the stone slab over the top of the staircase.

CHAPTER LIV.

JONATHAN WILD REACHES TYBURN-GATE JUST A LITTLE TOO LATE.

THE mode of communication between the two houses was certainly a most ingenious one. Those, too, who were inimical to the laws must have found it most convenient.

The close, shut-up air, however, in the passage was very disagreeable, producing as it did an unpleasant taste in the mouth, and a clammy feeling about the lungs.

Jack transferred the lamp to Blueskin.

"Haste, haste!" he said. "Snug as this place appears, yet I think the sooner we are out of it the better. Follow me."

So saying, Blueskin set off at a trot which soon brought them to the foot of the steps Johnson had mentioned.

Edgworth Bess still retained her hold upon Jack's arm. She accompanied him composedly—a circumstance which arose from no bravery upon her part, but from the feeling of safety the presence of her lover engendered in her bosom.

At the top of the steps Blueskin found the circular aperture, and covering it with his lips, he blew into it as steadily as he would have done into a tube, which it in reality was.

No result, so far as he could tell, followed this. He expected to have heard some sound, but all was still.

It was rather an anxious few minutes which passed after giving this summons before they heard a faint noise overhead.

Immediately afterwards the slab was raised, and a man carrying a light appeared.

His face was quite familiar to Blueskin, who had seen him many times. The recognition, too, seemed mutual, for the man uttered an exclamation.

"All right, Barham," said Blueskin. "Johnson has sent us here."

"Come on, then. What in the world can be up, that you come this way? Hullo! there's a girl, too!"

"My friend," said Blueskin, quietly, "you will find it your best policy to hear, see, and say nothing, and show us the way into the street at once."

"Very well, sir," said Barham, as he placed his lantern on the top of a cask, "you must just stop a minute, while I put the place square."

"Don't be any longer than you can help, then."

"I won't, Mr. Blake."

The means by which the opening was concealed were precisely similar to those in the cellar of the "Black Lion."

Having restored everything to its ordinary appearance, the man who had been called Barham by Blueskin, preceded them up a flight of stone steps, at the top of which was a door opening into the bar.

Here he paused, and extinguished the light.

Then he opened the door cautiously, and peeped forth, to make sure no one was observing them.

Finding the coast clear, he stepped out, and motioned to the fugitives to follow him.

"Now, Barham," said Blueskin, "I want you to do me a little service, and I can assure you it will be nothing out of your way."

"What is it, Mr. Blake? Let me know what it is, and it is done at once."

"I rather fancy, then, that some of Wild's men are lurking about on the look-out for us. I just want you to see whether there is or not."

"Oh, very well. Of course. Just so," said Barham, confusedly. He could not understand what Blake had to fear from Wild's men.

But he went off, nevertheless, in a perplexed, absent sort of way, to do his bidding.

"Now," said Blueskin, "if Barham comes back to say all's right, I propose we leave London at once. Our first consideration must be to find a place of refuge for Bess here, and where we know she will be perfectly safe. After that we can make arrangements for the future."

"Street seems all right," said Barham, returning at this juncture.

"Very well, then. We are off. Here is a guinea for your trouble."

All four now made their way to the front door of the little public-house.

At the time of which we are writing London streets were, after nightfall, comparatively deserted, for it was positively unsafe for anyone to be abroad.

It was very dark.

Blueskin turned to the left upon issuing from the inn.

Before, however, he had taken a couple of steps, he heard the trampling of many horses' hoofs coming along Drury-lane, at a tremendous gallop.

He turned round, and looked, and saw a disorderly troop sweeping down Drury-lane, in the direction of the "Black Lion."

"Jonathan Wild!" he said. "Come along, Jack! We have got off only just in time. You must run with me as far as Long-acre, where I will get horses."

He did not wait for a reply, but set off with great rapidity, and Jack and Bess had much difficulty in keeping him in view.

The thought of the implacable foe who was so close upon their track nerved them to an exertion of which, under other circumstances, they would have been incapable.

By the route taken, Blueskin showed that his knowledge of the locality was in no way inferior to Jack's. Avoiding the main streets, he threaded his way through a number of courts, and, at length, emerged into Long-acre, just opposite the place to which he was bound.

This was the livery stables from which he had procured a horse on a former occasion.

An archway of some length led into the stable-yard, and under this the darkness was profound indeed.

Here Bess and Jack waited while Blueskin made his way into the stable-yard.

"Do not be afraid," said Jack to his companion. "All will be well. I have every confidence in Blueskin, as he is called—every confidence."

"I am not alarmed," said Bess, quietly.

"You do not speak as if you were, at all events. However, we are very far indeed from being safe."

"Jack—Jack!" said Blueskin in an undertone. "Jack—Jack!"

"Yes!"

"Come this way."

Bess would not let go his arm, so the pair went towards Blake, whose form they could just distinguish as being a trifle darker than the surrounding darkness.

"What is it? What is it?"

"Can you ride?"

"A little."

"Very well, then. We shall manage capitally. We can have a couple of splendid nags. I will take one, and you can take the other."

"And Bess?"

"She must mount behind you."

"That will do."

"Hush! Go again to the top of the gateway. I will come with the horses in a minute."

And he was as good as his word, for, at the expiration of the time he had mentioned, he appeared leading two horses by their bridles.

"Now," he cried, as he sprang into the saddle, "up with you, and let us be off."

Jack mounted, and then he found that without assistance he could not lift Bess on to the saddle behind him, so that Blueskin was obliged to get down again.

He took hold of her round the waist, and lifted her on to the horse's back with all the ease in the world.

"Sit firm," he said, "and clasp Jack with both your arms, and you cannot hurt. Are you ready?"

"Quite."

Blueskin was on the back of his own steed in a moment.

"Listen, Jack, to what I am going to say. I will go first, and all you will have to do will be to keep me in view."

"But where are we going?"

"I hardly know yet, except to some little distance from London. We shall have no difficulty in finding the sort of place we want."

"I hope we shall not, and that we shall not be chased by Jonathan Wild."

"That is a vain hope, then. He has people in his employ all round about London, and he will soon find which way we have gone."

"Then if that is the case, there is no time to lose."

"There is not. However, we have got the start of him. Now, off and away."

Blueskin darted out of the stable gateway at a good speed, and Jack followed him closely.

It was perceptible in a moment that they were two splendid horses, admirable both for fleetness and endurance, and they sped down King-street with a tremendous clatter.

Blueskin shaped his course for the Oxford-road.

The road he took was not the ordinary one, that would have made pursuit too easy. He traversed instead the wilderness of streets about Seven Dials and Soho, and emerged at length into the Oxford-road not far east of the spot where it is intersected by Regent-street.

This was open country then. A few gentlemen's residences could be seen here and there, but nothing more in the shape of human habitations.

The road was smooth and level, so they allowed their horses to go with increased speed, which, so far from being unwilling, they were only anxious to do.

The rate at which they now went was one that precluded all attempt at conversation. Blueskin still kept a yard or so in advance.

Riding was Jack Sheppard's greatest delight. He had not had many opportunities for practice, but all that he did have he took advantage of, and in the present instance his knowledge of equitation stood him in good stead.

As for Edgworth Bess, though at first and naturally enough terrified at the apparent insecurity of her position, yet in a little while she became used to it, and held on bravely.

Presently Blueskin drew up.

"What is the matter?" asked Jack.

"Nothing. But do you see that faint light just before us?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"That is Tyburn Gate."

"Oh!"

Jack looked about him with an uneasy sensation.

"The triple tree, then," he thought, "is somewhere close at hand."

"We must go at a slower pace, so as not to excite the tollman's suspicion. I will go first as before. You follow."

"Hark!" said Jack. "What is that?"

"What?"

"Listen. Cannot you hear the beat of horses' hoofs?"

Blueskin dismounted in a moment, and flung himself flat down in the roadway.

For a space of time, during which one might have counted twelve, he listened.

"I can hear distinctly the beat of the hoofs of four horses. They are coming along at a tremendous rate."

"Is it Jonathan?"

"It may be, but I should scarcely think it probable he can have tracked us here so soon."

"On, my friend, on."

"Not so," replied Blueskin, remounting, "we must go along at an easy pace. If we do not, the tollman will not open the gate, and then we shall be done."

"We should."

At an easy rate, then, they now advanced towards the gate.



[EDGORTH BESS TAKES SHELTER IN THE RUINED ABBEY.]

The pikeman, hearing the sound of approaching horsemen, left his little tenement, and leisurely proceeded to undo the fastening of the gate."

"Here you are, my man," said Blueskin. "Here's a crown for you. I'm rather in a hurry to-night, so I will call for the change the next time I come by."

"Oh! thin, your honour's a jintleman, and I hope you"—
"Shut the gate!" roared a voice, "shut the gate. I am Jonathan Wild!"

"Och, then, you're a mighty big villin anyway," muttered the Irishman.

CHAPTER LV.

JONATHAN WILD MEETS WITH A VERY SERIOUS MISHAP ON THE WESTERN-ROAD, AND FINDS ALL HIS CUNNING COMPLETELY THROWN AWAY.

How on earth Jonathan Wild had managed to be so soon upon their track was more than either of the fugitives could conceive; yet by some means or another there he was.

"Shut the gate," he roared. "Stop them! Shut the gate!"

But Jack and Blueskin were already through.

They tore along the Great Western-road at a terrific pace.

The Irish toll-collector was evidently no friend of the thief-taker's. The words he had muttered were tolerably good evidence of the fact, but now what he did was even more unequivocal,

As soon as our friends were through he shut the gate, and fastened it, during which operation he muttered,—

"Jonathan Wild, is it? Oh! bad luck to you, you thief of the world. Wasn't it last session ye soragged the iligant O'Grady, fifth cousin, by the mother's side, to the O'Grady's, that's kings o' Connaught, if they only had their rights. Oh! bad luck to you!"

At this moment Jonathan Wild reached the gate.

The curses that came from his lips, upon finding his prey had escaped him, were of the most awful description.

"Open the gate!" he yelled. "Open the gate!" Then came another volley of oaths, during the utterance of which his men arrived.

"Oh! now. Be aisy, will ye. Shure, didn't ye say, 'Shut the gate!' and, by the powers, haven't I done that same?"

"Open the gate, I say! Refuse at your peril! I am Jonathan Wild."

"I know that well enough," said the Irishman, in a whisper, as he undid the gate.

Jonathan did not waste any time in swearing at the toll-man after the gate was once open, but dashed through it at full speed, closely followed by four of his men, who were almost but not quite so well mounted as himself.

Although the delay did not amount to more than a minute and a-half, yet it was enough to give the fugitives a tolerable start, and the circumstance was, for them, a most favourable one indeed.

But if it enabled them to get out of sight, it did not enable them to get out of the hearing of their pursuers.

"On—on!" Blueskin cried, at intervals. "On—on, or we shall be overtaken."

The pace at which they went was really something alarming.

Edgworth Bess was terrified, and clung tightly to her preserver.

But so long as she did that she was safe.

It was along the Uxbridge-road they went at this terrific pace.

At last the sounds of their pursuers no longer reached their ears.

"We have distanced them," said Jack, as he reined in a little, for his horse had begun to show signs of distress.

"Pull in a bit."

Blueskin did so, and listened.

Not the faintest tramp was perceptible.

"Can you hear anything?" asked Jack.

"No. I am puzzled."

"Why? We have come along at a furious rate. I have hardly been able to get my breath at times."

"I can't understand our getting out of earshot of them. Something has happened."

"So much the better then; but come, while we walk the horses up this hill—and they will be quite knocked-up if we don't—just tell me what is your plan of operations?"

"Jonathan being so soon at our heels has disconcerted me. The best thing we can think about, Jack, in my opinion, is to get as far away as we can."

"But where shall we go?"

"That I must think about. And now, don't you run away with the idea that Wild has given up the chase, because, if you do, you will be very wrong indeed. So long as we keep on the road he will follow us up."

"I suppose he will."

"You may depend upon it. If you will be guided by me, you will keep on at a good speed. The road is smooth and dry. Jonathan will soon make himself heard in our rear; but, having distanced him, as we appear to have done, we had better maintain the advantage we have gained."

This, supposing that they had really outstripped Wild, was the best possible advice, but neither of them put a proper estimate upon the cunning of their foe.

It was a mistake that they fell into, as will be shortly seen.

The top of the hill was soon reached, and the horses were much refreshed by the kind of rest they had had. They were really first-class animals, as was shown by the readiness with which they obeyed the impulse to set forward again.

Blueskin resumed his former position, and down the hill they swept like the wind.

They paused now and then to listen, but all behind them was quite silent.

The more Blueskin thought upon this circumstance the more he was puzzled, and, to tell the truth, alarmed.

No one perhaps knew Jonathan Wild better than he did, very few so well, and from his conduct on this occasion he felt there was everything to dread. It was part of his policy to lull his victims into a state of false security.

But he thought, whatever he may attempt, the best thing to do is clearly to make as much speed as is possible.

With this conviction upon his mind, he urged his horse forward, and as the bargain was that he should be kept in view, Jack had to follow his example.

In the far distance a few twinkling lights came in sight.

"What is that?" cried Jack at the top of his voice.

"Ealing," was the reply. "We will pull in a little as we go through the village."

They reached the outskirts of it in a few minutes, and reduced their gallop to a canter.

The high street was quite deserted.

Lights gleamed from many of the windows, showing that the inhabitants had not yet retired to rest.

But, without attracting anything in the shape of observation, they emerged into the bleak country beyond.

And now the moon, which was only a few days beyond the full, rose above the mass of clouds on the horizon, and lighted up the landscape with a silvery misty radiance.

"Forward, Jack!" cried Blueskin, again touching his horse with the spur. "Forward! forward! We are, as yet, a great deal too near London to be safe."

Scarcely, however, had his horse resumed its former pace than he pulled up with great suddenness.

"Halt! Jack!" he cried. "Look to your pistols! We shall have to fight for it yet."

Jack Sheppard gave a hasty glance before him, and then, uttering an exclamation of astonishment, did his companion's bidding.

By the aid of the moon he saw, at a short distance, four men completely blocking up the road.

"Surrender!" cried a voice, which reached them with the utmost distinctness. "Surrender! or we fire!"

The voice was Jonathan Wild's.

Yes, impossible as it might seem, there was no mistaking it.

Jonathan Wild, whom they thought they had left in the rear, was actually before them, barring their further progress.

They heard, too, his discordant laugh, and if any doubt as to his identity had been lingering in their minds, that would have at once dispelled it.

"Surrender!" he cried again. "It is your only course. If you give in quietly you shall have no ill usage."

Jack made no reply, but crept closer to Blake.

"What shall we do now?" he said. "It strikes me it is all over with us."

"I am a fool," replied Blueskin, "worse than a fool! I have allowed myself to be entrapped by Wild. There is only one course open to us. To retreat would be madness, because we should be sure to be intercepted by some more of the band. We must ride through them."

This was rather a bold course, but yet as he had truly said, it was the only one open to them.

Jonathan still maintained his position.

Surely he was playing some very deep game, or he would have dashed forward to attempt their capture.

But no. There he remained.

He called out again.

His object was to keep their attention occupied.

He would have succeeded had it not been for Edgworth Bess.

"Look, look," she said, in Jack's ear. "Look over the hedge to the right and to the left."

He turned and did so.

"By heaven! Blake," he said, "we are done. The remainder of his band, in two positions, are crossing the meadows on either side of us."

Blueskin only gave one hasty glance, and that sufficed to enable him to comprehend all the danger of their position.

"On, on," he said. "We are forced to it now. Fix yourself firmly in your saddle. Be ready with your pistols. By making a sudden charge we shall be able to force a passage right through them. Be ready at the word."

"All right, Blue."

"Now."

With an impetuosity scarcely to be conceived, the two horses sprang forward in obedience to the sharp application of the spur.

So utterly unexpected was this manoeuvre that, as Blueskin had rightly enough conjectured, Wild was for a moment completely taken aback.

But a man so used to sudden surprises as he was would sure not to be long recovering himself.

"Fire!" he yelled, as he drew a pistol from his holster. "Fire! Down with them! Shoot them both! Fire, I say!" A succession of reports followed his words.

But no execution was done. All were too much flurried to take a correct aim.

And now the men who had been perceived by Bess crossing the meadow reached the high road, and they tore along with all the speed they could induce their horses to make.

Wild and the other three men made a desperate but abortive attempt to check our friends.

Blueskin and Jack, as if by common consent, pointed their pistols at the thief-taker, and, as they swept by him, both fired.

The two pistols made but one report.

A hideous shriek came from Jonathan's lips, and his horse, rearing at the unusual sound, threw him heavily into the roadway.

This was an event that produced the utmost consternation in the minds of his men, and they rode their horses against one another at a loss how to act.

But when the others came up they dismounted, and went in a body to where he lay.

He was quite insensible, or else dead; which of the two it was they could not take upon themselves to say.

Levee was the first to recover himself, and take the responsibility of action.

In fact he had something of a personal feeling against Blake, which may go a long way towards accounting for it.

"Mount, four of you, and follow me. The remainder had better attend to Mr. Wild, and convey him to Newgate-street. Now, then, off and away."

But the time that had elapsed since Jonathan fell from his horse was sufficient to permit the fugitives to get both out of sight and hearing.

CHAPTER LVI.

JACK SHEPPARD IS ALARMED AT FINDING EDGORTH BESS HAS BEEN WOUNDED BY A PISTOL SHOT.

The appearance of Jonathan Wild in the road in advance of the fugitives looks a little mysterious, and lest the reader should fall into the mistake of supposing him ubiquitous, we will proceed to account for that rather peculiar state of affairs.

After the little cross accident at the turnpike he felt that his prey had got too good a start for him to be able to come up with them without a very long chase into the country, which was a thing he by no means desired.

They must be intercepted.

But how?

The strategic brain of the great thief-taker was not long in devising a means.

We have before had occasion to remark on the intimate knowledge he possessed of London and its environs. It had been acquired at the expense of a great deal of time and trouble, but its value to him was immense.

In the present instance he knew that the road curved very considerably round to the left, being, in fact, bowl-like in shape.

But this was scarcely apparent to any one upon the road itself. The radius of the curve was too great for it to be appreciated unless by some one viewing the country from above.

The idea, then, at once entered Wild's mind that if he took to the fields and pushed forward in a direct line at a good speed, he would be able to steal a march, so to speak, upon those of whom he was in chase, by getting in advance of them.

To be sure he ran the risk of losing them altogether, if they happened to take to the fields or any one of the cross-roads diverging from the main one, but a mode of preventing their escape by this means quickly occurred to him.

Taking three of the men with him, he directed four others to keep in the meadows on the north side of the road, and four more on the south, for by the time the altercation with the pikeman was over the remainder of the band had arrived.

Having made these dispositions, then, and in an incredibly short space of time, Jonathan set off at full speed over the open country, quite heedless of the damage he might do.

Jonathan calculated, too, that hearing no sounds of pursuit might lull the fugitives into false security, and cause them to proceed at an easy rate.

In this, as the reader is aware, he would have been perfectly right, had it not been that Blueskin felt the safest course was to get as far from London in as small a space of time as he possibly could.

Jonathan Wild, followed by his men, took his course most undeviatingly across the open country, with apparently nothing whatever to guide him.

At last he reached the cross-roads just above Ealing turnpike, and there he drew up.

His joy was great when the faint trampling of horses' hoofs reached his ears.

He was in time.

The eight men in the meadows, he calculated, would be very close indeed behind them.

So far all had gone well, when a little circumstance occurred which he had omitted to take into account, though, if he had, it would have amounted to much the same thing.

The moon broke forth.

Yes, that was the contingency that had been overlooked. The moon rose above the clouds, and he was discovered sometime before he intended to be.

He was in hopes that his sudden appearance right before their very faces would fill them with a momentary panic, of which he would take advantage.

The men in the rear would have prevented all retreat.

Had things turned out just as he wished, the position of our friends would have been perilous indeed; but, as it so happened, they saw him in time to save themselves.

Any ordinary man, one would have thought, would in Wild's place have even then dashed forward and attempted to capture them, but this he felt would be most impolitic until his men were behind them.

Then the affair would have been easy.

It would have so turned out had not Edgworth Bess happened to see the men crossing the fields on both sides of the road.

A bold action now alone could save them, and what could be bolder than attempting to force a passage over Wild and his three men?

The very audacity of the proceeding went a long way towards crowning it with success, for certainly nothing was further from Wild's expectations.

We have seen how it succeeded, and how, by a pistol bullet, he had been laid low.

Having thus far explained matters, we will return to the fugitives, whose perils were by no means over.

"Speak!" said Jack Sheppard, anxiously turning round towards his companion. "Speak, dearest, are you unhurt?"

"It is nothing."

"You were hit, then?" said Jack, as he brought his horse to a stand-still.

"What are you pulling up for?" asked Blueskin, turning towards them. "You must be mad! On—on!"

"Bess is wounded," said Jack.

"No—no! I hope not!" said Blueskin in tones of alarm, and reaching the side of Jack's horse with a bound.

"No—no! I hope not! At least, not seriously."

"It is nothing, believe me," said Edgworth Bess. "Do not stay. Oh! do not. Fly—fly!"

"But not if you are wounded. A trifling wound is made a dangerous one by inattention. Where were you hit? Speak quickly, in order that there may be no more delay."

"On my neck."

Blueskin leaned forward, and then saw that the back of the young girl's neck and her shoulder were quite covered with blood.

"This is a serious hurt, I fear," said Blueskin.

"No—no," cried Jack; "do not say that—do not say that."

With great speed now Blueskin took from his pocket a handkerchief, and with it wiped away the blood as well as he could, in order to discover the nature of the wound.

He trembled, in spite of himself, as he did so.

To his intense relief he found, however, that the wound was nothing more than a scratch along the back of her neck, and scarcely more than skin deep.

This would account for the profuse manner in which it bled, it being the characteristic of such wounds.

"A very close touch," he said; "but as it is, there is not much harm done."

"It is not dangerous, then?" said Jack, with a sensation of the utmost relief.

"Certainly not; all that is requisite is to stop the flow of blood. Take off your cravat, and I will form it into a bandage, and then matters will be all right until we can give it a little more attention."

Jack tore off his cravat in a moment, and handed it to his friend, who, having again wiped away the blood, bound it tightly about her neck.

"There," he said, "you will do now. It is a good thing you spoke when you did, or the consequences might have been serious indeed."

"Thank heaven," said Jack, "that you have escaped. I shudder when I think that a difference of two inches in our position, at that critical moment, would have bereft me of all I hold dear in the world, for, without you, I should not care to live. My life would have no purpose."

These words were, as the reader may suppose, spoken by Jack, in a whisper, to his companion.

Blueskin was listening for sounds of pursuit.

"They follow us, yet," he cried. "Forward, Jack, all is well now. We have an excellent start. Let us take care to keep it."

"Is Jonathan dead, I wonder?" asked Jack. "I heard him yell out."

"He was hit certainly; but whether killed, is more than I can say. His horse reared, and threw him to the ground."

"He will be incapable of continuing the pursuit in person, then. There is some hope in that. On—on."

"One minute," said Blueskin. "When we get far enough to be completely out of earshot of our foes, we will leave the high-road, and strike across the country to the right, where I am in hopes of finding you shelter, if Bess can keep up so long."

"Oh, yes—yes. Do not think of me, I beg, except that I am willing to endure anything to escape."

"You have a brave spirit, like your father."

"My father? You knew him, then?"

Blueskin was silent. He had, in an unguarded moment, said that which it was his intention to remain locked up in his breast for the present.

"Tell me. Tell me. My father? Oh, speak."

"I did know him. But this is neither the time nor the place for explanations. On, if we are yet to escape."

There was so much obvious truth in this that the young girl curbed her intense desire to know something of her parents, and continued silent.

The reader, however, must not suppose they had been standing still during this brief dialogue. Such was not the case. They had been going at an easy gallop, but now they put their horses to full speed.

Once more did the trees and hedgerows seem to flit by them, like objects in rapid motion. Once more did the beat of the horses' hoofs upon the hard road break the stillness of the night.

It was full three-quarters of an hour before Blueskin slackened speed, and then it was because he had reached the point where he wished to leave the high road; but before he did so it was necessary for him to ascertain whether his pursuers were within hearing.

He adapted the plan which he found serve his purpose before, namely, to place his ear upon the road and listen.

This time all was still.

Not the faintest sound which might be construed into heralding the approach of his foes made itself apparent.

"All is well," he said; "I really believe we have distanced them this time."

"Unless they have taken to the meadows."

"That is a point we can ascertain."

"How?"

"You are young and agile. Yonder is a tall poplar; ascend it, and from that elevation you will be able to command a view of the country for many miles."

"I will do it," said Jack, as he at once rode towards the tree spoken of, "I shall manage it easily enough."

"So much the better."

The feat of climbing up a tree was nothing to one whose muscular system was so well developed as Jack's

was, and in less time than one could have thought possible, he was amongst the topmost branches of the tree.

From this advantageous position he took a long, steady look about him, but nothing save the various objects which composed the landscape met his gaze.

Feeling, then, tolerably confident that their foes were not very close at hand, he descended.

"All is well?" said Blueskin, interrogatively.

"I hope so. I can see no one."

"Mount, then, and we will be off; but as we have yet to go some distance we will not distress our horses by making too much speed."

"They are splendid animals," said Jack, "and have served us well."

"All the better reason to take care of them. Come on."

With these words he turned down a narrow lane, leading in a north-westerly direction from where they then stood.

"Cheer up, dearest," said Jack, as he followed his comrade, whose position was now so different to what it had been.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE THREE FRIENDS FIND A REFUGE FROM JONATHAN WILD IN THE RUINS OF TYLNEY ABBEY.

Two hours after this our friends came to a halt.

During that time they had heard nothing of their foes. There were no indications of the coming day.

The moon had attained her greatest altitude and brilliancy, for not even one of those beautiful white misty clouds, so generally seen on moonlight nights, speckled the heavens.

"We are in Oxfordshire now, Jack," said Blueskin. "We passed the boundary a little while ago."

"Indeed, I had no idea we had come so far."

"Few have accomplished the distance in so short a time as we have. It is a good forty miles from here to London. And now look round. Can you on your right, at about a mile distant, see a mass of trees?"

"Yes, it seems quite a large forest."

"That, then, is our destination."

"The wood?"

"Exactly. But if you look a little more carefully you will see the top of an old ruin."

Jack Sheppard, whose curiosity was instantly aroused, strained his eyes, and then saw, dim and indistinct, something which, aided a little by the imagination, did look like a ruin.

Edgworth Bess, too, looked curiously towards the place which it appeared Blueskin had selected as being a safe place of refuge.

"What ruin is it?" asked Jack. "What place is it? Why are you so mysterious?"

"One question at a time. Walk your horse; there is no occasion for hurry now, and I will tell you."

"Will this road lead us to it?"

"No, you must take the first lane to the right. I will show you. And now to reply to your question. That ruin which you see yonder is all that remains to show where Tylney Abbey, one of the grandest ecclesiastical edifices in all England, once stood."

"I have heard the name."

"No doubt, no doubt. The place, as you see, is now surrounded by a wood. By some means or other the place has got an evil reputation, and the consequence is that not one of the inhabitants of this district can be, under any circumstances, induced to approach it."

"I see. And so you think from this very fact it will be a safe place of refuge?"

"I do, until a better can be found. I have no hesitation in saying that their supernatural terror is without adequate cause. Some accidental occurrence has given rise to it."

"I am not frightened," said Jack, hesitatingly, "but I do not know how Bess would be."

"With you safe and content anywhere," she whispered.

Jack was delighted with this reply, and regretted that their positions were such as to make it impossible for him to clasp her to his heart, which he had the greatest possible inclination to do.

"Bess," said Blueskin, who of course did not hear her

reply, "is, I am sure, possessed of too much good sense to be alarmed upon such needless grounds."

"It's all right," said Jack, "she says she don't mind."

"I knew she would not, especially if she took into account all the advantages there would be in staying in such a place. We might count upon absolute safety, for that we should rest somewhere is absolutely necessary."

"I am quite willing to be guided by you," said Bess; "besides which, I am most anxious to hear what you know about my father."

"You shall hear it. We will also take measures of some kind to rescue your possessions from your unnatural uncle."

"I am very curious to know several things," said Jack, after a short pause.

"Defer them until we arrive. Talking now is far from an agreeable occupation, besides which, I wish to tell you what I intend in a straightforward manner."

"One question," said Jack; "how long do you think of staying at this abbey? What is the name of it?"

"Tylney."

"Yes, Tylney Abbey. How long are we to stay there?"

"That will depend entirely upon circumstances. At present it is out of my power to say."

A few minutes now served to bring them to the boundary of the wood which surrounded the abbey ruins.

It was evident, from the manner in which Blueskin took the lead, that the place was by no means unfamiliar to him. Jack observed it, but said nothing. He knew that all would be fully explained at a fitting opportunity.

A broad, leafy glade, which seemed like some well-kept avenue in a nobleman's grounds, stretched out before them. The turf beneath their feet was soft and springy, and the horses' hoofs made no sound as they came in contact with it.

Upon most occasions this spot was in darkness, but now, owing to the altitude of the moon, it was lighted up with great distinctness, and presented a spectacle of magic beauty very rarely indeed met with.

As they proceeded, however, it grew gradually narrower, and consequently darker.

Upon reaching its termination, Blueskin spoke.

"Dismount," he said. "You will no longer be able to proceed on horseback. I will lead the way."

Jack obeyed, and assisted Bess to alight.

Both were glad, after having maintained one position for so long, to make this change.

With his horse's bridle over one arm, and the other arm supporting his fair companion, he followed Blueskin along a narrow and mazy footpath.

It was only with difficulty that they could see about them now, and at every step they took the darkness seemed to deepen.

But no words could possibly convey an idea of the intense silence that prevailed in that deserted place at that lonely hour, nor can the imagination, without reality, form a due conception of it.

More tangled became the path at every step they took, and more difficult to travel. Luxuriant undergrowth encumbered the ground, while projecting boughs from the trees and shrubs on either side of them formed almost an impenetrable barrier.

But when it seemed as though really they could force a way no further, a light appeared before them, and, in another moment, they emerged into a kind of courtyard in the abbey ruins.

This place, seen by the chastened light that then illumined it, was, indeed, most beautiful, and such as neither Jack nor Bess had ever seen or heard of.

The inclosure in which they stood was about a hundred yards in length, by forty or fifty in breadth. It was surrounded on all sides by tall, crumbling walls, their gray-looking surface being in many places relieved by dark patches, where the ivy, and other climbing parasites, embraced them.

Many windows and quaint-looking doorways were visible—the former all light—the latter deep shadow.

It was, however, but a hurried and transient view that Sheppard and his companion had of this place. Calling to them to follow him, Blueskin made his way in a direct line across it, and under a dark archway.

On the other side of this was a small paved court, not dissimilar in appearance to the one they had just left.

Beyond this there was another and another, which served to show Jack the vastness of the building.

At length Blueskin paused before a low arched door.

The stout oak wood of which it was composed had, like the walls, resisted time. It was clamped heavily with iron, which doubtless contributed not a little to its durability, for it now presented an appearance of great strength.

"It is a fine place, Jack, is it not?" said Blueskin. "A little ghostly-looking, but I like it all the better for that."

"I should think we should be safe here?"

"Safer than anywhere in England. Even if they knew we were secreted here, and that is a piece of knowledge they are not likely to get, they would have a great deal of trouble in capturing us. There are a thousand turnings and windings and secret places in the ancient fabric that would puzzle them, for the monks who built this place in olden times had cunning spirits."

"You seem to know all about it, Blue?"

"Do I?"

"Yes. Have you ever been here before?"

"Wait a bit. I'll tell you all presently. Bess, my dear—you must excuse me, you know—are you not very tired and badly in want of a rest?"

"I am indeed."

"Very well. Jack, just hold my horse a minute, and then I shall be able to unfasten the door."

Jack hastened forward, and took Blueskin's horse by the bridle, while that individual, after a minute's search in his pocket, produced a picklock.

Long practice had made him skilful in the use of such articles, and the bolt of the lock flew back in a moment.

The door creaked dismally as it swung open upon its hinges.

Blueskin took his horse again and led him through the opening.

Jack Sheppard, with Bess and his horse, followed.

It was in a kind of garden that they now found themselves, or rather what had at some remote period or other been a garden. Now it was merely an enclosed place, overgrown with tall, luxuriant grass.

A great portion of this place was in shadow, for the walls were so high as to intercept at least one-half of the moon's rays.

Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess could not help looking about them with the greatest curiosity and interest. To the young and unvitiated taste there is always something entrancing in the contemplation of such scenes.

"This place will do for the horses," said Blueskin, as he turned his loose. "They cannot stray from here, do what they will, for there is no outlet except by that door yonder, and that we can keep closed."

As he spoke, Blueskin raised his arm, and pointed to a small door in the wall nearly opposite the one by which they had entered, and which had been carefully secured again.

"And where does that lead to?" asked Jack.

"To the interior of the ruins. Hitherto you have seen nothing but the outer courts."

"It is an extensive place."

"You have had no means of judging of its vastness, for what you have seen forms but a small portion of the venerable pile. But come, I will show you the interior."

With the help of the picklock Blueskin opened the little door.

He stood on one side to allow his companion to pass him.

Then he secured the door.

"Keep straight along the passage. There is no obstruction, and it is only a few feet in length. There is a flight of steps at the end."

But although this assurance had been given him, Jack felt rather disinclined to walk along a place so profoundly dark as that was, so he would have Blueskin to precede them.

It was not for his own sake though, that Jack Sheppard was so careful. It was for his companion's.

Blueskin advanced without hesitation to the foot of the stairs he had spoken of.

"It is an awkward place in the dark for those who are unaccustomed to it, so I will get a light."

"Will it be safe?"

"Oh! yes. If any of the peasants saw it they would set it down to the ghosts."

The ascent was a fatiguing one, the steps being upwards of a hundred in number.

At the top Blueskin turned round, and ushered them into a small chamber.

"This is at the top of the north turret," he said, "and here we are quite at home you see."

CHAPTER LVIII.

BLUESKIN GIVES EDGORTH BESS AND JACK SHEPPARD SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS PROCEEDINGS.

THAT portion of the old abbey ruins which was known as the north turret derived its name no doubt from its position, forming, as it did, the most northerly portion of the edifice.

The room at the top really did look as though they would be at home in it. To Jack's astonishment he found several articles of furniture in it, which could only lately have been placed there, while in a primitive-looking grate a quantity of wood was piled up, which would soon burn up into a good fire.

These things were rendered visible, not so much by the lantern Blueskin carried as by the light of the moon, which poured in through the window in a perfect flood, and lighted up every corner with the greatest distinctness.

"Here we are quite at home, you see," said Blueskin again, as he closed the door; "you did not expect this, did you? Stop a moment until I have lighted the wood, and then see how different the place will look."

"It's a strange thing to find it in this condition, but I suppose it is your doings."

"No." "No! There is a story attached to the whole affair which you shall know at the earliest opportunity. I know you are curious, but if you will let me be I will tell you all that has taken place since we parted. There, now, that is something like."

Blueskin had opened the lamp and set fire to the wood.

It blazed up bonnily.

"It is," replied Jack Sheppard; "and now Bess, sit down. Here is a chair. I am sure you must be weary in body and mind after all you have gone through to-night."

Edgorth Bess smiled faintly. She bore up well, but in reality she was all but exhausted.

It must be borne in mind that although she had not lost any serious amount of blood, yet she had lost enough to weaken her to no small degree.

The bandage which Blueskin had placed around her neck had effectually stanchd the effusion of blood.

It was really surprising how comfortable the old place looked after the space of two or three minutes, and when Blueskin went to a cupboard which they had not previously noticed and took from it some provisions their comfort was quite complete.

All were hungry, and made a hearty meal of the substantial fare before them; but as soon as the cravings of hunger were appeased, Jack turned to Blake, and said,—

"I am dying with curiosity to have an explanation of all this. I am puzzled beyond measure. Do not keep us any longer in suspense, but tell us at once."

"Such is my intention. In the bottom part of the cupboard you will find some wood. Put some on the fire, and we shan't have to interrupt to do that. Then I will begin."

Jack gladly enough executed this commission, and piled the wood on the fire in such a way as to make it readily catch light.

But as he did this, his eye rested upon the bandage round Bess's neck, and he recollected that her wound had not been attended to, as it ought to have been, first thing.

"Forgive me," he said, and his voice proclaimed how much he was vexed. "Forgive me for being so careless and forgetful; but I have been so much occupied by the sights here, that I forgot to look to your wound."

"Oh! yes," she replied, "so had I."

She carried her hand to her neck as she spoke.

"Then if that is the case," interrupted Blueskin, "it

shows that it is nothing of any account. I am glad of it."

"But that is no excuse for me," said Jack. "It might have been dangerous."

"If I myself forgot it, I think you may be excused for doing so. Until you spoke, I had forgotten it."

With trembling fingers Jack undid the bandage, and when it was fairly removed his delight may be imagined, when he found the bullet had done nothing more than scratch the skin for about two inches.

The bleeding must have ceased immediately the bandage was tied over it, for it was scarcely stained.

"Thank heaven!"

Bess smiled.

All three now seated themselves round the fire, while Jack, taking his fair companion's hand in his, with her awaited the commencement of Blueskin's narrative.

"In the first place," he said, "about these ruins."

"Yes—yes. How did you come to know of them?"

"From one of Wild's men."

"One of Wild's men? How, then, can we be safe? Will he not search this place thoroughly?"

"Wait a bit, until you have heard all. This man's name was Geoffrey. He was a great friend of mine. He is dead, now. Jonathan had him hanged the sessions before last."

"Indeed."

"He did. One day he took me so far into his confidence as to tell me of this place, though he assured me that he had never before hinted at its existence to any one. He always intended it in case of danger as a place of refuge to which he could fly and remain undetected."

Jack nodded.

"It was he, then, who managed at odd times to furnish the place as you now find it. He also laid in a splendid supply of fuel in the shape of wood. In his conversation, he very accurately and minutely described the whole of it, so that when I came here yesterday to verify his story, I had no difficulty from his description in finding my way hither."

"Yesterday?"

"Well, perhaps it would be more correct to say last night, for it was night when I got here. I learned a very important fact, namely, that Lord Donnull—for such is his name—had had an interview with Wild."

"I guessed as much from what Jonathan said to me."

"Oh! indeed. Now, however, I am overrunning my story. I ought to have told you when speaking of Geoffrey that it was only two days after he told me about this place that Jonathan had him committed to Newgate on a charge of robbery, and seven days afterwards executed at Tyburn."

"Good heavens! Can it be possible?"

"It was, and so you see there is a pretty fair inference that I am the only person to whom this place is known. I mention this in order that you may have no groundless alarm about it."

"Very good, and now you say you learned that Lord Donnull had had an interview with Jonathan?"

"Just so."

"Then what had that to do with your coming here?"

"His lordship I knew could only have seen Wild upon one subject, and that was relative to his niece. He would offer a large sum for Jonathan to place her in his hands."

"I think he did."

"You remember, then, that the last I saw of you was when I left you speaking to Wild in his own room?"

"I know it was—the villain! Where did you go?"

"To the 'Maggie and Stump' opposite, and who should I find there when I entered but Quilt Arnold, who, in the course of some talk we had together, told me that Lord Donnull had had an interview with Jonathan."

"I see."

"Well, I waited a long time at the 'Maggie,' for where I sat I could see the door of Little Newgate, and I made sure I should see you come out, but you never came, and at last I thought, as the hours slipped by, that you must have slipped out when my attention was withdrawn, though I hardly thought it was possible."

"I was in one of Wild's dungeons then, my friend."

"Never mind now. Tell me your adventures when I

have done. I thought at last I would go over and inquire whether you really had left. Tonks was on the lock, so I asked him. He told me you had been gone more than a couple of hours."

"The villain!"

"Wild had no doubt told him to give that answer to anyone who might inquire for you. I was far from satisfied. I went to the 'Black Lion,' and found you had not been there. Then some suspicion of the truth entered my mind."

"I suppose so."

"However, I was rather at a loss how to act, for I did not know who was in the most danger, you or Edgworth Bess; but I reasoned thus: you were better able to defend yourself than she was, and so I made up my mind to find her some secure place of retreat, where she would run no risk of being found by Wild, and then turn my attention to you, for I made up my mind that you should suffer no injury at the hands of Wild."

"Thanks for that. It shows you are a friend."

Blueskin took no notice, but went on.

"While casting about for a place, this old abbey came into my mind. I did not decide upon it all at once, but thought of several other places. In the end, however, I decided upon this."

"So far, of course, all was quite right, except that I had only Geoffery's word for such a place being in existence. Bess I knew would be safe for a few hours longer where she then was. So I mounted and rode here to see whether all was as had been represented to me."

"I begin to see now."

"Of course you do. Although then I had my doubts, yet I felt pretty sure that I should find things just as he described them. Still, as there was a doubt, I thought it would be impolitic to take Bess away from the 'Black Lion' until I had satisfied myself, as, by so doing, I might perhaps be taking her into unnecessary danger."

"You were thoughtful."

"No harm, I considered, would ensue if I took down with me a good stock of provisions, so I did so. Came here—found the place as you see it now, and stowed the provender into the cupboard."

"Capital. Really, the more I hear the more indebted I become to you."

"Just stir the fire and listen. Having succeeded so far I turned back to London. The first place I went to was Drury-lane. Johnson was standing at the door. I asked whether Bess was all right, and on telling me she was, I went without delay to Newgate-street."

"You were indefatigable. And you did all this for me?"

"Partly for you, partly for her. For the pair of you I would gladly do ten times as much. It was early morning when I reached Wild's house: in fact, about an hour before dawn. I found the place in the utmost confusion. Joe White had been killed by a blow on the head, and two prisoners had escaped. I soon found they were you and some other person."

"Sir Marmaduke Osborn."

"Wild was furious, and out somewhere, as they supposed, in search of you. As this was several hours after you had made your escape I felt pretty sure that you had got clear off. At all events I did not see how I was to be of service to you, so I went to bed, for I was utterly worn out."

"I should think you were."

"I do not believe I could have kept up an hour longer. I went to bed then, and never awoke until about an hour before you saw me."

"Indeed; what did you do?"

"I learned Wild had come home. I felt that you and him and Bess yonder would be enemies to the death. I could not serve both, so I followed my inclination and sided with you."

"And you will?"

"To the last day of my life. Jonathan and myself are now as great enemies as you and he are. The interview I had with him was a rather stormy one, and he made an attack upon my life. In the brief struggle that ensued, though, I proved myself the stronger, for he was badly hurt."

Jack laughed.

"I left my mark, I know."

"It was you then that had mauled him so, was it? Never

mind, I got off all safe, and arrived at the 'Black Lion' just in time to save you."

"You did, indeed. Without your interposition we should both have been inmates of Wild's house."

"Not a doubt; and now you know all."

"Not all," said Edgworth Bess, quietly, who had never uttered a word during the explanation, "not all. You promised to speak to me of—of—my father!"

CHAPTER LIX.

IN WHICH BLUESKIN RELATES THE STORY OF HIS LIFE, AND ADVISES EDGWORTH BESS TO PURSUE A PARTICULAR MODE OF ACTION.

"So you did, Blueskin," said Jack Sheppard, "so you did. I, too, am full of anxiety to know that. I will tell you my adventures afterwards."

A remarkable change came over the face of Joe Blake, but this circumstance only inflamed Jack's desire.

"At last," he thought, "I am going to hear that which he has before so resolutely refused to tell me."

Blueskin spoke, and both the young people became eagerly attentive to the words he uttered.

"I have already told you the name of your unnatural uncle. It is Lord Donnull, but the title, like the estates, is not lawfully his, although he has so long held possession of them."

"But he shan't much longer," said Jack, impetuously. "My whole energies shall be employed in wresting his ill-gotten gains from him."

"It is rather singular, but I have to tell you both about your fathers. Strange, too, neither of you can remember them."

Upon hearing these words Jack trembled violently; then, starting to his feet, he stood by Blueskin's side and whispered in his ear,—

"When you speak of my father do not allude to—to"—He could not complete the sentence. "His ignominious fate," he would have said.

"I understand," said Blueskin, "don't be afraid; I would not speak of it before her for the world."

"That is well."

Jack, whose mind was now at ease, resealed himself.

Edgworth Bess looked at both with great surprise, but to Jack's relief said nothing.

"They are two rather singular things," continued Blueskin. "However, you must know about twenty-two years ago, Jack's father—Tom Sheppard his name was—and myself were in the employ of Lord Donnull—not the present lord—his brother."

"My father?" said Edgworth Bess.

"Just so. I was at that time eighteen; Tom Sheppard four years older; that is, twenty-two. The situations we relatively occupied were coachman and valet. Tom was the former, I was the latter."

"Indeed."

"A very great friendship subsisted between us, and had done for years. Our master was a kind and indulgent one, and the place was everything we could wish."

"It was soon after this that your father, Jack, married, and in less than a twelvemonth after that our master married too."

"There were grand rejoicings on the occasion, of course, and none entered into them with apparently greater zest than master's only brother, Abel."

"The one who is now lord?"

"Yes."

"Go on—go on."

The narrative was one that made them feverishly impatient to hear the sequel. Already the dire domestic tragedy was shadowed forth before them.

"All went well, and then, Jack, you were born. Two years afterwards she who now sits by your side came into the world."

"Just before the accouchment I happened to catch a glimpse of Mr. Abel, for so he was called, as he came out of the library. His aspect frightened me."

"Still, at that time I did not connect the two events at all, though I afterwards had good cause to do so."

"I know that it was master's hope that the child about to be born should prove a boy, but in this he was disappointed. It was a girl."

"But whatever regrets he might have felt upon this account were quickly banished by the alarm, the serious

and even dangerous aspect which his wife's illness assumed, for he was more attached to her than husbands are to their wives generally.

"The poor lady never rallied. She lingered for some time, but, in spite of all that medical science could do, she died, and her husband became disconsolate."

"Upon thus hearing the fate of the mother she was destined never to know, the tears thronged thickly in the eyes of Edgworth Bess and trickled down her cheeks.

"The little one, however, which, unlike its parents, was healthy and robust, still lived, and this afforded the bereaved husband the greatest consolation, and, as she grew older, centred in her the affection he had previously felt for her mother. He doated upon her in the fullest acceptance of the word."

"My poor—poor father," said Edgworth Bess, with a fresh outburst of sorrow. "And am I never to know him?"

"He is dead," said Blueskin, avoiding a direct reply to her question.

A pause now of some few moments duration ensued.

It was Jack who spoke.

That probably was because he was the one least under the dominion of painful emotions.

"Come," he said, "do not be so downcast. Go on, Blueskin. Let us hear the rest."

"The worst part of the story is now to come," he replied; "by far the worst part, as you shall hear."

These words caused Edgworth Bess to look up with renewed curiosity.

"It will disclose that which I have never uttered to mortal—what has made me what I am. What I refused to tell you, Jack, on more than one occasion."

"I know you did."

"Lord Donnull, my master, then, doated on his daughter, but adverse fate had not yet done with him. One morning the child disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, and no trace was left to show where it had gone. My master was like a madman. In vain every means which could be tried was made available, all was without result, except that suspicion fell upon two persons."

"Two persons?"

"Yes, Tom Sheppard and myself."

"And how was that?"

"By the machinations of Abel Donnull. We were had up, but, although nothing could be proved against us, yet the suspicion which had been attached to our characters was unremoved. We were forced to quit that service in which we had been so happy. Vainly we both tried to elsewhere obtain employment. The story spread—we were refused—and, to save ourselves from starvation, were driven into crime."

"Good heavens!"

"I need not tell you that we were innocent both in thought and deed. Unwearied were our efforts to find the lost one, for we hoped, in the event of our succeeding, all would yet be well; but all was vain, and at last we gave up the search in despair."

"You are both now in possession of facts of which I was then and for long after ignorant. Grief prematurely hurried Lord Donnull to the tomb. You have already learned the conditions of the will. His brother Abel is now in possession of the title and estates."

Edgworth Bess and Jack Sheppard now comprehended all.

"Then this uncle of mine must be a very wicked man," she said.

"He and I have an account to settle," replied Blueskin, "and woe to him when the day of reckoning arrives."

The tone of his voice was gloomy and threatening.

"He has much to answer for," he said. "Thank God, that part of his villainy which doomed you to death was unfulfilled!"

"Between us we can surely overthrow him," said Jack Sheppard.

Blueskin shook his head.

"The task will be a difficult one," he said, "a very difficult one. He is bold and unscrupulous himself, and will obtain bold and unscrupulous agents. Unfortunately, we are not so well situated to defend her as we might be."

"You have already done more than ever I can repay you for—much more," replied Edgworth Bess, "but

there is one thing you have not told me, and that is my name. Is it Elizabeth?"

"It is Lady Elizabeth Donnull."

The title sounded strange to her, and when he heard it Jack seemed to feel a barrier rise up between him and the object of his affections.

"I hope," she said, for with a woman's quickness of perception, she read what was passing in Jack's mind. "I hope that to both of you at least I shall never be anything but Edgworth Bess."

"You have your mother's disposition," replied Blueskin. "She was an angel! May your fate be happier than her's."

Alas! this was a hope that was destined not to be fulfilled. However, our readers must peruse the strange story of her fortunes to the end, when one of the most terrible of domestic tragedies will be made patent to them.

"Do not let me ask this of you in vain?" she continued. "Promise me, Jack," she said, as she put her hand upon his shoulder, "promise me that you will never think of or call me by any other name."

"I will—I do!"

"I don't know whether it's right of Jack," said Blueskin, "to make love to you in that kind of way. You must recollect that his position in life is very different to yours."

"Yes; that is it," replied Jack. "I too can feel that it is not right."

"Jack," said Bess, reproachfully, "I do not deserve this; I recollect only that he is my preserver from death, or some still worse fate."

"Well, I hope you will be happy. You will be, if I can make you so! I can tell you this though, Jonathan Wild is a man who is to be dreaded as an enemy."

"Pho! pho!" said Jack. "I don't feel afraid of him; I have always beaten him yet. Listen. I will tell you what took place after you left me with him."

Jack Sheppard then, without further preface, proceeded to relate those facts with which the reader has already been made acquainted. How Jonathan endeavoured to persuade Jack to join him in the nefarious scheme against the heiress, how he had refused, how he had been cast into a cell. Then how he overheard the conversation between Wild and Sir Marmaduke Osborn. The manner in which he entered the baronet's cell, overcame Wild, and set free the unfortunate victim of his rapacity. Their singular adventures on the river, and at last the baronet's decease. To all this Blueskin listened with the greatest conceivable interest, and when Jack concluded his narration, he said—

"For all this, and the wound he received to-night, Wild will seek a bitter vengeance. I tremble for the result."

"Pho! pho!"

"You will find it no light matter. He is a desperate villain!"

"I do not fear him!"

"I never doubted your courage, but you must admit that I know him much better than you do."

"Granted."

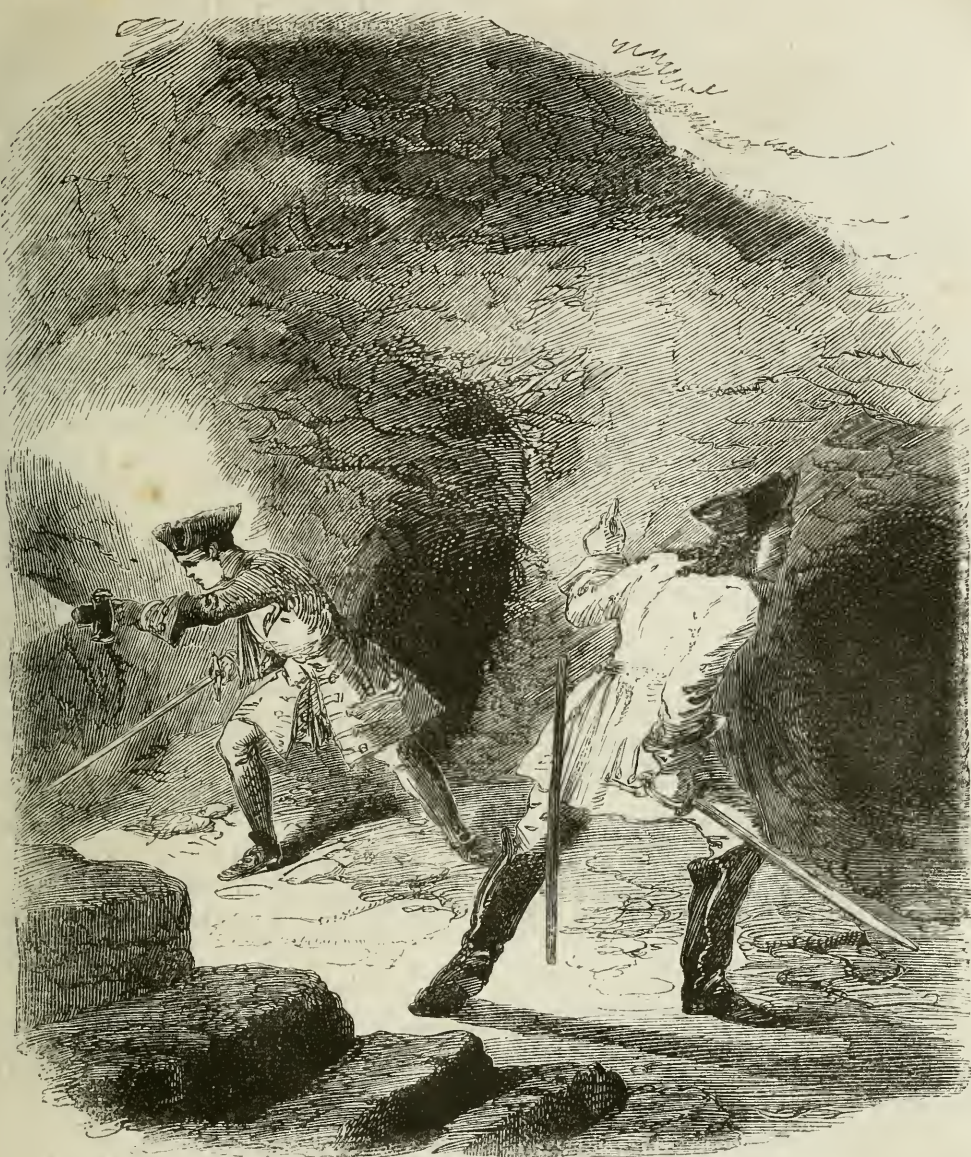
"Then I say to you, in all earnestness, beware! We have a difficult and a dangerous part to play, and the chances are all against our being successful."

"Not for the sake of all the riches in the world, then," said Edgworth Bess, "shall you incur this danger on my account. You have done enough already."

"No—no! besides which, we fight for justice. My poor master's memory, although he died thinking badly of me, demands it. By doing this, is the only way of atoning for the crimes of which I have been guilty."

"I am content to leave my inheritance in the hands of those who hold it," said Edgworth Bess. "I have never known wealth and luxury, and therefore do not feel their loss. Let him remain."

"And do you think," said Blueskin, solemnly, "that by such a course as that you are acting rightly. I mean with justice to yourself and your dead parents? No, I am sure you do not. Right is right! but wrong is no man's right."



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD EXPLORE THE PASSAGE BENEATH THE NORTH TURRET OF THE RUINED ABBEY.]

CHAPTER LX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

"THAT is true," said Jack Sheppard. "It is a duty you owe to society, to yourself, and to your deceased parents, to strain every nerve to gain possession of that which is yours, by all laws, human and divine."

"I cannot but be convinced of the truth of what you say," said Edgworth Bess; "and after all you have both done for me, it would be unkind and ungenerous upon my part to longer hold out against you."

"That is well," replied Blueskin, rising from his seat. "But look, the new day has already come. While the sun is above the horizon we have but little to fear, and as we must all take rest in the shape of sleep, that is obviously the best time for us to do so. We will then defer all further talk for some few hours. The accommodation is but rude. This room, Bess, we will leave to you, Jack and I shall be able to find a place below."

This proposition was so warmly seconded by Jack, that Edgworth Bess was compelled to accede to it.

"You may consider yourself in perfect security," added Blueskin, as he left the room. "Do not suffer anything to alarm you. We will keep such good watch at the foot of the stairs, that you shall be effectually shielded from all harm. Not, however, that I apprehend anything, but still, we shall take care to be prepared."

Then, without waiting to hear the thanks of the young girl, whose position without two such staunch and true adherents as they proved to be would have been sad indeed, Blueskin closed the door and descended the turret stairs.

"I don't know where we are to find sleeping accommodation," he said to Jack; "but I suppose you, like me, will not be very particular."

"I shall not; besides which, I do not feel at present particularly in need of rest. Do you?"

"Well, no, I can't say I do. When I have a good sound sleep it lasts me for some time."

"So it does me. Now nearly all day yesterday while I

was returning from Tilburyness in a lugger I was asleep, so you see I am not very much in need of it."

"Here, then, is the bottom of the stairs. What do you propose to do?"

"I leave that to you. Is there any outlet to this place save the one by which we entered?"

"Oh! yes. I noticed two small doors."

"Where do they lead?"

"That is more than I can tell. My knowledge of the place is confined to the places you have already seen."

"Then you do not know what is on the other side of those doors?"

"No more than you."

"Then I shall not feel comfortable until I do. I am very curious and restless in that respect."

"Well, we will look if you like. It will serve to pass away the time."

They now paused before one of the doors of which Blueskin had spoken. It was a surprising thing that the wood should have resisted decay in the manner it had, for, although it must have been some centuries old at least, yet there it was firm and strong upon its hinges.

The lock, however, was a very rude affair, with a key-hole large enough to put three fingers into, so that Blueskin unfastened it with the greatest ease.

"Ah! Jack," he said, "people are beginning to understand locks a little now. When this was made they had a notion that the larger the lock and the heavier the key the more secure it would be. That was a grand mistake, and some day people will find that a small lock is a better defence for a door than a large one."

He pushed open the door as he spoke, and crossed the threshold with Jack close at his heels.

Neither were exactly prepared for the magnificent spectacle which now presented itself. The little door led into what was evidently the chapel of the abbey. It was in an excellent state of preservation.

The red gold tints of the rising sun lighted it up with magic splendour. There was a magnificent oriel window—or rather the remains of one, for much of the fine carving and the whole of the glass had disappeared—in the eastern portion of the chapel, and it was through this that the sun's rays came.

It would have been impossible for anyone human to gaze upon such a scene as that was without the keenest sensations of delight, and Jack, who had a warm appreciation of the beautiful, was especially enchanted.

Blueskin, too, who beneath the rough exterior he had assumed carried a mind that had been well informed and a nature almost as gentle as a woman's, was scarcely if any less pleased.

Had it not been for the unfortunate chain of circumstances which had conspired to fix upon him the abduction of the young heiress, how different in every respect would he have been.

He had now, though, the consciousness that he had an important duty to fulfil. He would devote his life to the restoration of his master's daughter to her lawful rights, and, as he reflected upon the strange events which had made her acquainted with him, he fancied he recognised in them the finger of that mysterious power called Providence.

May he succeed! The task, though, would be one of fearful difficulty and danger. No one knew how much the power of Jonathan Wild was to be dreaded better than he did, and he could not help trembling for the result.

Lord Donnull, too, as the reader has seen, was not a man to stick at trifles where so important a thing as ousting him from his estates was concerned. He had all the resources which abundant wealth ever places in the hands of its possessor, while they were fugitives from the laws.

Bitterly, most bitterly, did Blueskin repent that he had led Jack into crime. But it was now too late. The mischief was done.

Such is a summary of the train of thoughts that passed through his mind as he gazed upon the ancient chapel. Jack noticed his abstraction and spoke of it.

"It is nothing," he said. "Come, we have, I fancy, seen all there is in this place to be seen. Let us return. There may be no danger, still we ought not for a moment to leave her unguarded."

This was quite sufficient to make Jack turn back, and

hasten to the foot of the turret-stairs. All was still there, however, and just as they had left it.

The second door was now opened. The lock was so corroded with rust that it for a long time resisted all Blueskin's attempts upon it. At last however, it yielded.

"Hullo!"

"What now?"

"Why, look, the place is as dark as pitch. It must be the way to the vaults."

Jack peeped over his friend's shoulder, and certainly the black-looking space on the other side of the door did look as though it led to the vaults. A damp, earthy smell, too, was perceptible.

The turret-staircase itself, which was of course a circular one, received ample light from the loopholes, which were at regular intervals let into the stonework, so that the comparison between the two places was very great indeed.

"You have got a lamp, Blueskin, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Light it, and then, perhaps, we shall be able to see what kind of place it really is."

"I was just going to do so when you spoke. Stop a minute."

The little lantern was quickly lighted. It was a bull's-eye, and a broad bright ray of light issued from the lens.

"Why," said Blueskin, "it is just a continuation of the turret-stairs."

"So it is," replied Jack, as, leaning forward, he convinced himself of the truth of what his friend had just said.

"Where they lead to of course I don't know. Somewhere underground. The cellars, most probably."

"Is it worth our while to go down?"

"I hardly knew. Are you inclined for an exploring expedition?"

"I am; and independently of that, in my own opinion, I think it ought to be a kind of duty upon our part to make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with every nook and corner of the place, and all its intricacies, in case at any time, we should be attacked here."

"You are right. Not that I much fear such a thing. Still it is possible, and in the event of it, why such a knowledge as you speak of would prove most serviceable."

"I am glad you think as I do."

"It would hardly be possible, on such a point as that, to hold a contrary opinion."

"How differently you talk, and how differently you seem in your manner to what you did when I first knew you."

"Do I, Jack!"

"You do, indeed."

"Then it is because I am more like myself. The other was assumed. The truth is, I was sick and weary of the world. I hated it because it had so unjustly persecuted me, but now that I have found my master's daughter I have something like a purpose in living, and so you see the mask is slipping off my face, and I am becoming more like I once was."

"I am glad of it."

"Well—well! Let us leave it. Are you ready?"

"Quite!"

"Then follow me."

"You think we can leave the turret in safety."

"Oh! yes. I do not think we have anything to fear. Leave the door open and come on."

Blueskin at once began the descent of the winding steps. He held the lantern so as to diffuse as much light as possible.

As they got lower and lower, however, the dampness and chilliness of the place perceptibly increased.

The walls, when the light fell upon them, were seen dripping with wet, while in many places they were overgrown with a kind of green moss.

After descending some thirty steps, Blueskin came to a halt.

"There seems no end to this place," he said. "How much lower do the stairs go, I wonder?"

"That I expect we shall only be able to ascertain by going down."

"I shall try twenty steps more, and if we don't reach the bottom then, I shall feel inclined to give it up."

"Nonsense. Let us explore the place thoroughly."

Blueskin set off again, and after going about six steps lower, he found he reached the bottom of the steps.

They both laughed at this.

The steps terminated in a kind of vaulted chamber, octagonal in shape, and only just high enough to stand upright in.

From this there branched off no less than seven passages.

"Why, this is like a rabbit-warren. Jack, it will take too long for us to explore such a place as this."

"I am afraid so, but we will not go just yet."

They both advanced into the centre of the octagonal apartment, and looked about them.

The entrances to the subterranean passages were all just alike, or so nearly so, that they could detect no difference.

There was nothing to choose between any of them so far as that went.

"Let us go down this one," said Jack, pointing to the opening just opposite him.

"A little way, but I don't think it will be much use, for from the look of the place I should say it was used for the burial of the dead."

"Oh! who knows? Come on."

"Not without some precautions, Jack; I have heard a great deal about such places as these, and how heedless persons have entered and never found their way out."

"Nonsense."

"It is quite true; they are all made just alike everywhere, so that by the time you have made one or two turnings you cannot tell in what direction you are actually going."

"What shall we do then?"

"There is a means," said Blueskin, "if you still wish to enter and explore them. You must get me a piece of mortar somewhere out of the wall."

CHAPTER LXI.

RELATES THE STRANGE THINGS WHICH WERE SEEN IN THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGES BENEATH THE NORTH TURRET.

"A piece of mortar?" repeated Jack, "what in the world for?"

"Get it, and I will show you."

Jack had very little difficulty in picking a tolerable-sized piece of mortar from between the interstices of the stones. It was sticky and soft, but it was all the better for that.

"You take the light," said Blueskin, as Jack handed him the lump of mortar, "and lead the way."

About half-a-dozen steps inside the passage he called to him to stop.

"Hold the light down, so that I can see the floor."

Jack did so, full of curiosity to know what it was his companion purposed doing.

He soon comprehended, and was delighted with it.

The floor of the passage was of hard, dry earth, and on this, using the piece of mortar as a substitute for chalk, Blueskin drew an arrow, with the point turned towards the stairs—that is, in the contrary direction to that in which they were proceeding.

"Capital," said Jack.

"It is a good device, and one that is often practised. At every dozen yards or so, I shall draw one of these arrows, so that we shall have no difficulty in returning, or, at any rate, no hesitation as to which is our right course."

"I see. Come on."

The passage, as Blueskin had anticipated, was uniformly the same in its general appearance. It wound about in a serpentine fashion, and occasionally they came to where other passages either branched off or led into it. Whenever this occurred he was particularly careful with the arrows.

"I do not wonder at people losing themselves in such a place," said Jack, as they emerged into a chamber resembling the one they had just left. "If I did not know it was impossible, I should say this was the spot we started from. Look, there are six openings, and the one we have just come out of makes the seventh. Here, too, is a door, with steps beyond it."

"Ha! ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"At you, to be sure, for supposing this chamber to be one resembling that we have just left. Why, it's the same."

"Impossible."

"One would think so. I should have been of that opinion, but we can easily convince ourselves. Look, here is the passage we have just come out of."

"Yes."

"Well, I will draw an arrow. Now, there it is. If it is not the same chamber as the one we left, we shan't find the arrow on the floor. We can't mistake one for the other, because this is at the very beginning of the passage."

"I see."

"And the other is about half-a-dozen steps in, is it not?"

"It is."

"Very well, we will take them in succession, and rely upon it we shall soon find it."

Jack could not bring himself to believe that his comrade was right. He did not think it possible that they could have taken such a circuitous course as to come out at the spot from which they started.

Such though, extraordinary as it seemed, proved to be the case. Just inside the third turning to the left of the one from which they had emerged was the one they had entered such a short time before. The arrow which Blueskin had drawn dissipated all doubt.

He very much enjoyed Jack's astonishment, and he said—

"I have often read of such things as this, and so the result was to some extent expected by me, but it will serve to convince you of the necessity of taking the precaution I did, in order to find our way out again."

"It is wonderful," replied Jack. "I can now scarcely realize it."

"I can understand that, and now let us try another. From what has happened, I feel almost sure that there is here some secret mode of exit. If we can find it the advantages will be more than we can correctly estimate, for not only may it prove of service to us, in case we should have to escape, but also as a mode of entrance, for if I mistake not we shall find the outlet at some considerable distance from the ruins themselves."

"I am ready, then," said Jack, "and I only hope your supposition may be confirmed."

As he spoke these words, he followed his companion down another of the passages.

The resemblance that was preserved was really wonderful. This passage was the exact counterpart of the others. For a long time they went on and on, until at last Jack began to think there was no termination.

Blueskin led the way.

Suddenly he trod upon some treacherous substance, which crunched beneath his feet, and, before he could recover himself, he fell at full length on the ground.

The lamp flew from his grasp, rolled for a foot along the floor of the passage, and then disappeared.

In an instant all was utter darkness.

Jack Sheppard uttered a loud cry of astonishment and alarm, which sounded dismally in the cavernous place.

"All right!" said Blueskin, scrambling to his feet. "Stand still, Jack. Confound it; but it is no more than I deserved. I ought to have been more cautious."

"But the lantern," cried Jack; "what has become of it? This darkness is awful."

"The fall doubtless put it out. Be careful not to move. We shall find it. That's better."

Blueskin took a match from his pocket and ignited it.

There was for a moment a bright flash of light, and he held it low down on the ground.

The first thing that met his gaze was the substance which had caused his fall.

"Good heavens, Jack!" he cried, "this is a skeleton."

"A skeleton?"

"Yes; all but crumbled to dust. It was treading on it that threw me down."

"Can you see the lantern?"

"No. I will crawl forward a little way."

He went down on his hands and knees.

In his right hand he held the match, which, being composed of some ceraceous substance, burned for some few moments.

His left hand he used to feel the way.

All at once he found the ground gave way beneath his hand.

A rushing noise as of earth falling down a well followed.

Then the match went out.

He could not restrain a groan, and the perspiration of intense fear broke out over him.

His left hand grasped nothing but vacancy.

The horrible truth flashed in a moment through his brain.

"What is the matter, Blake?" asked Jack. "Speak. Are you hurt?"

"No, thank God! Do not stir hand or foot for the world."

"What is it?"

"Stop, and I will get a light."

Trembling in every limb, Blueskin assumed a sitting posture.

He drew forth from his pocket the box of matches.

But his hand shook to such an excess that he could hardly light one.

At last he did so.

The tiny flame fell full upon his face.

Jack was astounded at its ashy paleness.

"Speak, Blake," he said. "What has happened? You look frightened to death."

"And well I might. Hold the match a moment for me. I have in my pocket some pieces of candle which are used to burn in the lantern. I will light one of them, and then we shall be better able to see what we are about."

This was quickly done.

Of course the light it gave now was nothing near so bright as it was when in the lantern, but still they were able to see tolerably well with it.

Blueskin rose to his feet, and grasped the smooth wall of the passage for support.

He could not control his agitation.

"You are not so frightened at a skeleton, are you?" asked Jack.

"No," he replied in a hollow voice. "It was the narrow and miraculous escape I have just had from a frightful death."

"A frightful death?" repeated Jack.

"Yes. Come forward carefully, and I will show you."

The piece of wax-candle had now fairly caught light, and burned freely.

Blueskin held out his hand as far as he could before him, and took two steps forward.

Jack followed.

"Stop!" he cried. "Look there."

Jack strained his eyes, but saw nothing.

"Look where?" he asked.

"On the ground before you."

Jack Sheppard glanced down near his feet, and then, to his horror, found he was standing upon the verge of an abyss.

The first shock over, he proceeded to look more carefully about him.

The disappearance of the lantern was at once accounted for.

The floor of the passage abruptly terminated at the brink of a pit.

Of its extent forwards he could form no idea, but it reached from one wall to the other.

It was now Jack's turn to feel sick at heart, as the imminence of the peril from which he had escaped became palpable to him.

He turned to his comrade.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"You may well ask that, and be thankful for the accidental circumstance which was the means of preventing our falling down that frightful place."

"I am thankful."

"But for the presence of that skeleton, and my accidental fall over it, our doom would have been sealed. Nothing could have saved us."

"Nothing, I fear."

"The perils of this place are even greater than I thought they were. I have heard before now of such places contrived by the subtle spirits of the monks. This pit has evidently been contrived as a trap to destroy those who wandered in this place unpossessed of its secrets."

"It is awful."

"Who this poor wretch is we shall, I suppose, never know, nor how it was he perished where he did. Little did he think that his crumbling remains would, perhaps a hundred years after his decease, be the means of preserving two human lives."

"Let us retrace our steps," said Jack, "with all the caution possible. We will no longer tempt our fate. Come!"

"In a moment. Where we are we have nothing to fear. The danger of this place consisted in the fact of the existence of the pit being unknown. Once aware of it, the peril ceases."

CHAPTER LXII.

SHOWS HOW THE REMAINDER OF THE DAY WAS SPENT AMONG THE OLD ABBEY RUINS.

"I DON'T pretend to gainsay that," replied Jack, "but the sooner we get back again I think the better."

"So do I. Your nerves, like mine, are unstrung. I confess I never in my life experienced so terrible a sensation as I did when I found the earth give way, and my hand slip into the pit."

"I don't wonder at it."

"I am vexed the lantern has gone, we should then have been able to make a better examination of the place. I should be loath to leave it now until I have satisfied my curiosity. Lie down and crawl forward, and I will hold the light. We then shall be able to see a little more, I hope."

Curiosity was a strong feeling in Jack's breast, and now, as he recovered from his shock, he was quite willing to examine the place.

By adopting the means proposed there was little fear of falling over.

They crawled forward until their heads and necks hung fairly over the edge of the pit, if such it were.

But, although Blueskin held the little piece of wax candle down to the full extent of his arm, they could see nothing more than the side upon which they were.

This was composed of dark, shiny rock, and went down perpendicularly. They could not, however, see anything like the bottom.

Jack felt about him for a stone, which would enable him to form some estimate of its depth, by the time it took to fall.

He soon found one.

It was a piece of rock, about two pounds in weight.

Blueskin saw what he was about, and said—

"Throw it forwards, and we shall have an idea of its diameter."

"That is what I was going to do," replied Jack, as he let go the piece of rock.

It disappeared instantly in the gloom, and then directly afterwards they heard it strike against the rock on the opposite side.

Having struck, it glanced off, and then continued to rebound from side to side until the motion grew so rapid that they were unable to count the strokes.

A faint splash followed.

Then all was still.

"A frightful depth," said Jack, with a shudder.

"Come away. We can know no more, now."

"We cannot. Jack, my friend, our death would have been certain if we had fallen down that place."

"I shudder when I think of our narrow escape. Let it be a lesson to us to be careful. Oh! if we had fallen, what would have become of Bess?"

"Do not unman yourself by speculating upon that. We are saved, but by little short of a miracle."

They both rose as Blake thus spoke.

"Have you another piece of candle?" asked Jack. "If you have, light it, and let me carry it. We shall then see better where we are going."

"Yes, I have several pieces. I always take care to supply myself well with them, in case of accidents or circumstances occurring to make it impossible to get them just at the moment they are required."

"It is a wise precaution," said Jack. "In future I shall take care always to adopt it."

"You should never, under any circumstances, be without having the means about you of readily procuring a light. Think what our position would have been if I had only

provided myself with one piece of candle. We should have been starved to death in these passages, for to have got out in the dark would be utterly impossible."

"You reconcile me to our position," replied Sheppard, "by showing me how much worse it might easily have been. I shall never forget this."

"Nor I. But before we go, let us look more attentively at the poor remains, which, by throwing me down, saved my life and yours."

Only a few bones were on the floor of the passage, and they were in the last stage of decay. The least touch, and they would have crumbled into dust.

There was nothing to indicate the age, sex, or position in life of this skeleton; and having convinced themselves of this, they made their way along the passage towards the octagonal-shaped room.

How pleasant it was now, by an occasional inspection of the arrows Blake had drawn, to feel sure that they were pursuing the right direction, and not involving themselves in the mazy intricacies of the place.

Both drew a long breath of exquisite relief when they, after a little while, emerged into the octagonal chamber, from one side of which ascended the steps leading to the turret.

"Thank goodness!" said Blueskin, "we are safe at last. It is by no means the first time in my life that I have had a narrow escape from death, but still it was always in some encounter. I fairly tremble now when I think we might both have walked into the abyss, and only become conscious of having done so when we found ourselves falling headlong down."

"Such a death would be awful indeed. But the peril is over now. Let us ascend. I feel no desire to run any further risk by an exploration of this place."

"Nor do I. Besides which, we have been quite long enough absent from the turret-stairs. We ought to assure ourselves that all is well with our young charge."

"You do not fear anything?"

"By no means; but that is no reason why we should leave her unguarded."

"No, no; we have been wrong, I think, to absent ourselves at all."

As he made this remark, Jack sprang up the winding flight of steps, and soon reached the level of the earth.

Blueskin was immediately behind him, and, as he emerged from the vaults, he shut the little door after him as he said—

"I don't think I shall be tempted to venture down there again."

"I am sure I shall not, and yet it would have been a great satisfaction if we could have found some secret mode of entering and leaving the place."

"You are right; but we must abandon the idea, at all events in that quarter. I think, too, that we may rest pretty well assured that we have nothing to fear in the shape of attack. Few people would visit this place, and none less likely than Jonathan Wild."

"All seems right," said Jack, after a pause, during which he had listened intently at the foot of the stairs.

"Yes, if silence is to be taken as a token of it. Let us go up. Bess must, by this time, have had sufficient rest."

Jack did not need to be told this twice, and he mounted with an agility and speed that soon left Blueskin in the rear.

On reaching the door he tapped gently at it, and said—

"Bess—Bess! Is all well?"

Jack heard a hasty movement, and then the door was opened.

"Oh! Jack!" said the young girl, "I am so glad you have come. I have sat here until I have grown quite frightened. I came to the door once, and called, but I could not make you hear."

By the time this little dialogue was finished, Blueskin entered the turret-chamber.

Edgworth Bess had suffered the fire to go out, and, as the evening was now creeping on, Blake thought the best plan would be to light it again.

This he soon did, and by the time it was fairly dusk, they were all three seated in pretty near the same positions as on the preceding night.

Bess was refreshed by a long, deep sleep she had had, albeit her couch was by no means of the softest; but then,

when one is thoroughly weary, that is but a slight inconvenience.

As for her wound, it was now quite well. There was an ugly mark reaching across the back part of her shoulder, but she was quite willing to put up with that when she thought of what a narrow escape she had had of being dangerously wounded, perhaps even killed.

The conversation, as on the preceding night, very quickly turned upon her fortunes, and Blake was called upon to furnish yet some additional particulars, but as they were upon trivial matters it is not worth while to repeat them here.

However, from the narrations of all three a very good and distinct idea of her whole position could be obtained.

There was one point, however, that would be rather difficult, and that was proving her identity. It was all very well for such facts to be asserted, but then something more was needed, and that was proofs.

These it seemed pretty certain rested in the hands of the unscrupulous Lord Donnull, who would, of course, take every care not to do or say anything inimical to his own interests and friendly to hers.

Jack and Blueskin, too, were so placed as to make it almost a matter of impossibility for them to give evidence, besides which, Jack could only say that he overheard a conversation, which would amount to little or nothing.

The people, too, who lived in Charles-street, Drury-lane, into whose charge the heiress had been given, were dead, as was also the man who had so placed her.

In fact, the more they considered and thought over the case, the more difficulties and obstacles presented themselves to their view. Bess herself was quite dismayed, and Blueskin would never have persevered had it not been from a strict sense of duty.

Many and various were the plans proposed during their long and important conference, but every one of them, after mature consideration, were abandoned as impracticable.

And now, suddenly, as Jack was making some remark, he paused.

He fancied a slight sound reached his ears from the direction of the staircase.

He listened, but as all now was silent, he concluded that his sense of hearing had deceived him, and went on with the sentence he had begun.

But before he reached its end, they saw most positive proof that some one was on the staircase.

Blueskin and Jack sprang to their feet, and drew their swords.

But before they could perform another movement, the little door leading into the turret chamber was burst violently open, and a party of men rushed in.

CHAPTER LXIII.

LORD DONMULL AND STEGGS ARE BENT UPON THE YOUNG GIRL'S DESTRUCTION.

At the precise period of time at which the incidents recorded in the last chapter took place, there sat in a gorgeously-furnished apartment in a west-end mansion a well-dressed man.

Without the air was chill, but within that chamber it was of an agreeable warmth.

In the polished grate burned a sea-coal fire, and as its flickering light fell upon the fire-irons and thick crimson hearthrug, it produced an appearance of extreme comfort.

The room was furnished consistently throughout; that is to say, the different articles in it harmonized in their appearance and colour.

That colour was the richest of all—crimson.

Some would have said the effect produced was rather monotonous than otherwise, but that could be merely a matter of opinion.

A rich, downy, velvet-like paper of the brightest crimson covered the walls. It was relieved in places by gilt devices, while a neat gilt cornice running completely round the walls at their junction with the ceiling, presented not only a pleasing contrast, but also gave an air of great magnificence to the whole.

The chamber itself was spacious, but it lacked height, which was a great detraction; at any rate, it would be considered so to-day, though then they were considered "the thing."

Very rich crimson curtains, with bullion fringes, and cords and tassels of the same material, were drawn before the two latticed casements.

The antique sofa and the massive high-backed chairs were made of rosewood, and cushioned with crimson velvet.

A cloth of some similar material covered the large table in the centre.

From the ceiling, which was of carved rosewood, depended a chandelier, carrying a large number of wax candles.

Each of these was enveloped in a kind of glass sheath, faintly dyed with crimson, so that the light itself, which was diffused, was of a rosy character.

The effect of this harmoniousness was rich beyond all expression, but chiefly of all was it suggestive of comfort and enjoyment.

But, strange to say, the inmate of this chamber possessed neither of those blessings.

As he leans back in the large comfortable arm-chair, a look of great care and uneasiness of mind is apparent in his countenance.

The soft, mellow light with which the place is filled prevents the ghastly pallor of his countenance becoming apparent. It has now the hues of health, or rather seems to have them.

Evidences of wealth were visible about his person; for a hundred years ago the differences of station were more marked than they are now.

His attire was of the costliest material.

As he is seated there in deep and anxious thought, one hand plays nervously with the arm of the chair.

It is a long, thin hand, and on two of its fingers glitter rings of great worth and lustre.

But, as we have said, with everything around him conducing to happiness and repose, with everything calculated to soothe the feelings, yet there he sat troubled, agitated; the only thing in the magnificent apartment that was out of keeping with the rest.

No one to have looked at him, environed by luxury as he was, would have envied him.

The age of this man we have taken such especial pains to introduce to the reader was verging upon fifty, but, in the open street, he looked ten years older at least.

His lips moved slightly, as though his thoughts were so intense that he was all but compelled to give them verbal utterance.

Then he suddenly sprang to his feet, and walked up and down the room with rapid tread.

Upon the soft carpet his feet made not the slightest sound.

Between the two windows was a massive sideboard.

Ranged upon it with marvellous taste were many pieces of gold and silver.

In the centre was a stand for wines and spirits.

It was before this that the man paused, after having taken some thirty or forty turns up and down the room.

He took up a crystal goblet that would contain almost a pint of liquid, and filled it with brandy.

A few bright beads clustered round the edge.

He held it up to the light.

His hand was trembling and unsteady.

Then he drank the greater portion of the fiery spirit at a draught, and resumed his hurried walk.

Unconsciously he gave utterance to the thoughts that weighed so heavily upon his brain.

"How will it end?" he said. "How will it end? To think that after living all this time in such a state of perfect security as I have, that obstacles and cares and perplexities should arise now! All, too, through the bungling agent I employed to do my work. Had he performed his part of the contract as I performed mine, all would have been well, I should have nothing to fear. Now, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

He flung himself down in the chair as he spoke.

The words he had uttered will enable the reader to recognise him.

Lord Abel Donnull.

Yes; that is the man.

The unnatural brother.

The usurper of his niece's wealth and broad domains.

The man of bad, bold heart, and many crimes.

Vainly did he strive to conceal from himself the fact

that a day must some time come when his deeds would be visited with a just retribution.

Like most bad men, he was a coward at heart.

No emotion of pity could possibly be shown for him.

He was surrounded with parasites, with menials, with tools, by which he wrought his evil purposes, but among them all there was not one heart who, in the hour of tribulation, would have said, "God bless him!"

But he clung to wealth at first because of the natural cupidity of his soul; now, because it had grown into a kind of second nature to be surrounded by it.

To obtain it had he not stained his hands with crime? Was it likely, then, that he would relinquish it?

It is ever the curse or fate of such men as Lord Donnull to find at their fingers' ends a spirit to tempt them still further into evil.

That evil spirit was the man Steggs.

Who he was Lord Donnull knew not. He had come to him with the death-bed confession of the man Williams, and from that moment they had been hourly companions, actuated apparently by the same motives, working to the same end.

Whether they were or not remains to be seen.

And now, on this particular evening, as he sits in the large arm-chair, a sharp knock at the door reached his ears; but, before he could recover himself sufficiently to cry "Come in," the door was opened, and Steggs glided in like an apparition.

There was a great show of respectful submission in the way in which he stood just upon the edge of the hearth-rug.

"Sit down, Steggs," said his lordship, "sit down. What is the news?"

"There is none, my lord."

"None?"

"None."

"Have all your efforts been unsuccessful?"

"All, my lord! I have searched in every direction. I have employed men to scour the whole of the country round London in search of her, but to no purpose."

Lord Donnull let his head fall between his hands.

"Don't give up, my lord; all is not lost yet. I have faith still in Jonathan Wild."

"I tremble at his name," was the reply, "and if he knew the real facts of the case I should consider myself lost indeed."

"But he does not! the lad Sheppard and he are deadly enemies."

Again did Lord Donnull spring in an agitated manner to his feet.

"I shall go mad if this continues," he said; "I can feel now such wild confusion in my brain that I am scarcely conscious of my actions."

"Try some brandy, my lord," replied Steggs; "it is a sovereign remedy in cases of that sort."

"I will follow your advice," he replied, as he gulped down the remainder of the spirit in the goblet.

"You are better?"

"I—I think I am."

"I am sure of it, my lord. Sit down and calm yourself, we will talk matters over quietly."

"Quietly!"

"Why not?"

"There is too much at stake. But what did you say about Jonathan Wild?"

"That I had faith in him."

"Why?"

"Because when he says a thing, however impossible it may appear, he *always keeps his word*."

"And he promised to put—put—Elizabeth in our possession."

"He did."

"But when he does, Steggs—supposing he does—what must be done?"

"That will be for your lordship to decide. Two courses will be open to you; but, if I might advise, I should say wait till then."

"And when did you see Jonathan Wild last?"

"When we visited his house together."

"Not since?"

"No, I have been to Newgate-street many times, but without being able to see him."

"This frightful suspense will kill me, if it lasts much longer," cried his lordship. "I am like one walking

upon the crater of a volcano, expecting every moment an eruption."

"Your nerves are out of order. Once let Jonathan place the girl in my hands, and I will answer for it, that you have no further trouble with that affair."

"Do so, Steggs," said Lord Donnull, as he clasped his rascally accomplice by the hand. "Do that, and you may name your own reward!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

JONATHAN WILD IS IN A VERY BAD WAY INDEED.

THE four men Levee had left to attend to Jonathan Wild, while he with the rest galloped off after the fugitives, held a brief consultation as to what they had better do.

One after another they examined the prostrate body of the great thief-taker.

He was at all appearance dead.

Very little blood, though, could be seen upon the road.

There was an ugly wound in the upper part of his jaw, but whether sufficient to cause death was rather a debatable matter.

The subject under dispute was not so much whether Jonathan was dead or whether they should obey Levee's orders and take him to Little Newgate, but rather in what way he should be conveyed there.

It seemed pretty conclusive that one of the four would have to surrender his horse, for Jonathan's steed, when it reared and threw him, dashed off along the road toward London before any one could stop him.

Now they were all equally disinclined to do this, but as there appeared to be no prospect of settling the dispute by other means they agreed to draw lots.

The job fell upon one of the men named Matthew Flood, as ferocious a villain, perhaps, as ever graced the gallows at Tyburn, which interesting event occurred in a little more than a twelvemonth after these events.

This Matthew Flood, then, upon finding that the lot fell upon him, uttered some very diabolical and awful curses, which it is by no means our intention to repeat.

However, he had to submit.

Jonathan's body was lifted rather roughly on to the back of this horse.

Not one of these four men had been without suffering some brutality or other at his hands, and now that he was in such a condition as to make it impossible for him to defend himself, they paid off some of the grudges they had against him.

To be sure it was very cowardly of them, but then what could be expected from such base spirits?

In a Mazeppa-like fashion Jonathan was placed upon the back of the horse, and bound to it, partly with the men's belts, and partly with the rope they always carried about them.

The chief part of this tying business came to Flood's share, and the way in which he knocked Wild about was really awful to behold.

At length all was ready, and the strange cavalcade set out on their return to London.

Matthew Flood walked by the side of the horse.

The thief-taker gave no signs of life.

In this way, then, they some hours after arrived at the door of Wild's house in Newgate-street.

Flood had not walked the whole of the distance, but induced his companions to share that duty with him.

St. Sepulchre's church chimed half-past two as one of the men hammered loudly at the door.

The man on the lock allowed them to enter.

Still exhibiting no sign of returning consciousness, Wild was carried upstairs, and put into a bed-room on the second-floor, which he, whenever he slept on a bed, used as a sleeping-chamber.

One of the four men had started off for Ebenezer Snaxall, to whom the reader has been introduced already.

He was not very pleased to be aroused from his slumbers at that unreasonable hour, but when he was made the recipient of the very startling intelligence that the great Jonathan was dead, he hurried on his clothes without another word, and was out in the street in a trice.

On reaching Jonathan's bed-side he made a long and careful examination of him, and the nature of the hurts he had received.

Then he shook his head.

"How do you bring it in?" asked Flood.

"Ha! I—a—rea—"

"Where is he?" cried a rather thick voice at this moment, and a female of huge proportions rushed into the room. "Where is the lamb? Oh! oh!"

The large female flung herself upon the bed, and began howling at a great rate.

"Oh! my poor lamb," she said, "my poor lamb. Have they murdered you at last? Oh! I'm a lone widder now!"

These last words will at once have the effect of informing the reader of the kind of relationship that was supposed to subsist between her and Jonathan.

Yes; she was the great thief-taker's wife.

She would have doubtless earlier than this made the acquaintance of the reader, but the fact is, about a month before this narrative commenced, a rather serious quarrel had taken place between Wild and his spouse, which terminated by her being kicked into the street by her lord and master, and being strictly forbidden ever to cross his threshold again.

This injunction she had obeyed until this particular evening, when, having imbibed sufficient cordial compounds to raise her courage, make her forgiving, and rather amorous, she very boldly and in despite of all opposition, forced her way in.

Upon being told Jonathan was out, and having satisfied herself by searching the place that such was really the case, she sat down in the thief-taker's own sanctum, and announced, with many expressive yet not elegant flowers of speech, her intention to wait there until the "dear lamb" came home.

There was something exceedingly droll about the idea of a remorseless villain like Jonathan being called a lamb!

Most certainly there was nothing lamb-like in his disposition, except in comparison with hers.

A man who is thus spoken of by his biographer:—

"The name and memory of Jonathan Wild will be ever held in abhorrence. . . . The single history of the arts, deception, cruelty, perfidy, and crimes of this man filled a volume, and should we occupy more room in our epitome than may be deemed necessary, we have only to observe, that scarcely would the whole catalogue of other crimes exposed in our chronology, centred in one man, produce a parallel with this complete thief-taker and finished thief."

But bad as he may have been, yet it seems to be on all hands conceded that this woman, whom the above-quoted historian describes as being well known "as one of the most notorious pickpockets and abandoned prostitutes on the town," was a very great deal worse, and the fact that she made him what he was, and first led him into crime, is pretty well established.

Such was the woman, then, who pretended to be so overcome with grief at Jonathan's decease.

They were a precious pair.

In vain did Mr. Snaxall entreat the lady to remove from her position, and allow him to ascertain whether he was really dead. She answered him only with renewed howls, which so disgusted Flood that he left the room at once.

The idea of attempting to remove her by main force never found a place in the apothecary's mind for a moment; he had too much dread of her fistful powers.

But a result ensued which was rather unexpected.

Jonathan was not dead!

No, despite the really dangerous wound, and all the harsh treatment he had endured at the hands of his own men, life was not extinct.

The caresses of Mary Milliner, for such was the name of the woman who passed as his wife, aroused him.

Only partially though did he regain his faculties, and the consequence was he fell into a very natural mistake.

Feeling some one above him he made sure it was an enemy, a foe making an attack upon his life.

Without, then, waiting to see who it was—as for the correctness of his supposition, he had no doubt whatever about that—he uttered a terrible roar which would have befitted some wild and ferocious denizen of the wilderness, and springing up, he clutched the unfortunate woman round the neck with a grip like that of an iron vice.

So suddenly was the pressure applied, that she had no time to utter a cry for help.

The only witness was Snoxall, the apothecary, and he was speechless and aghast.

A struggle of a very terrible nature now took place between Jonathan and his spouse, which, as a probable enough result, terminated in the pair rolling together off the bed.

The crash was so tremendous that the whole house was shaken, and in another moment there was a hurried trampling of feet, and a body of the gang rushed in.

They saw what was amiss at once, but dared not interfere.

Their presence, though, aroused Wild from his insane fury, and he looked about him.

His eye fell upon his assailant.

Then he uttered a yell, caused in part by seeing who it was, and in part because his hurts just then began to make themselves felt.

With an effort of strength he freed himself from his companion, and scrambled to his feet.

Then dealing her a heavy kick, he prostrated her upon the floor.

"What is all this, eh?" gasped Wild, as he clutched the bedpost with both hands for support. "What is all this, I say? Speak! Are you all dead?"

"If you please, Mr. Wild!"

"Bah!"

Mr. Snoxall came forward, and then another accession of pain in the lower part of his face forced itself to Wild's notice.

He began to comprehend.

"Lie down on the bed, my good sir, and let me attend to your wound. You will soon be better."

Jonathan complied silently, but only because such a frightful sensation of pain and weakness came over him, that he found it impossible to stand up any longer.

CHAPTER LXV.

MARY MILLNER, JONATHAN'S PRESUMPTIVE WIFE, COMES IN FOR A SHARE OF HIS BRUTALITY.

BUT although the thief-taker fell backwards on the bed in the manner recorded in the last chapter, yet he did not again lose his consciousness.

It seems incredible that any human being could have borne up against such frightful injuries as Wild did, but the fact was, not only did he possess a frame and constitution as hard as iron itself, but an indomitable mind to correspond.

And so between the two he suffered with impunity what would have been sufficient to kill any ordinary mortal. To be sure he suffered some temporary inconvenience, but that was all.

He controlled himself so far as to be quite still while Mr. Snoxall, whose skill in the treatment of wounds was very great, made an examination of his injuries.

The apothecary probed about with a disagreeable-looking steel instrument, but Jonathan made not the least sign of additional suffering.

He was trying to recollect what had taken place, and account for his present desperate position.

By thus diverting his thoughts, he was able to bear the pain with greater fortitude.

By slow degrees he remembered all that had taken place up to the moment Blueskin and Jack Sheppard fired at him.

After that, of course, he knew nothing, until he woke up and found his discarded wife bending over him.

He had just reached so far when Mr. Snoxall spoke—

"It is a very narrow touch," he said. "I never knew such a thing before in my life. However, as it is, there are no bones broke, so you will soon be all right again."

Upon hearing this assurance, Wild felt better at once, and he raised himself upon one arm.

"One moment, Mr. Wild, if you please," said the apothecary: "let me put a bandage on it."

To this Jonathan submitted with pretty good grace, but as soon as the operation was concluded he sprang to his feet.

"Brandy!" he cried; "give me brandy!"

"Murder!" said Snoxall, terrified at the idea.

But Jonathan walked to a little cupboard by the side of the fireplace, and brought out a black-looking bottle.

This he placed to his lips and took a long draught.

The apothecary watched him with wonder. It was by no means the first time he had seen Wild do such a thing, but he could not get over the surprise of it.

There was a marked difference in the tone of Wild's voice as, patting down the bottle, he pronounced the one word—

"Better!"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan's eye fell upon the form of Mary Millner, who had just recovered from her swoon, and raised herself to a sitting posture.

Although stultified with the liquor she had drank, she was able to recognise her husband.

"My poor lamb," she howled, "they told me that you was dead, and I was a lone woman; but the poor lamb is spared."

She got upon her feet as she spoke, and made a wild drunken rush at him.

"Hold off!" cried Jonathan, as stepping aside he avoided the encounter; "hold off, woman, or it will be all the worse for you."

But blinded by drink, and unheeding what he said, she turned and made another staggering rush at him.

Jonathan's face assumed a terrible expression.

He drew his sword from its sheath, and projected it before him.

"Keep back!" he said, "or you'll have this in your vitals! Keep back, I say; do you hear me?"

The loud tones of his voice seemed to reach her understanding, and she brushed the hair back from her face.

But the good lady was not to be so repulsed.

For the third time she attempted to clasp him in her arms.

Jonathan saw her coming, and stepped back a pace.

Then holding his sword straight before him, he received the wretched woman on the point of it.*

She felt the steel enter her skin, but she could not stop herself, and the sharp weapon passed completely through her chest and out at her back.

Uttering a loud and fearful cry of anguish, she fell backwards on the floor of the room weltering in her blood.

"Curse you!" he said. "You would have it. And I hope you are satisfied."

Now Mr. Snoxall, although present when this took place, never made the least attempt at interference. He had too much good sense to interpose his body in conjugal quarrels.

Having thus got rid of his unfortunate wife, Jonathan strode down stairs.

As he reached the hall some one knocked loudly at the door.

The man on the lock, who had seen Wild come down the stairs, opened the door with marvellous celerity.

"How's Jonathan?" said a voice, which that individual himself recognised as belonging to Levee, so he shrank still closer in the shadow of the wall in the hope of hearing something. "Have they brought him in dead this time, or how?"

Now, the man on the lock happened to be on friendly terms with Levee, so he had all the inclination in the world to put him upon his guard against saying anything imprudent, by letting him know that Jonathan was in the hall.

But it was quite out of the question for him to do so without Wild being aware of it.

"How is the old villain? He hasn't cheated the hangman, has he? I hope not, for I live in hopes of seeing him tuck up at Tyburn some day. So do you, Wilkinson, don't you? It would be a brave sight! Ha! ha!"

Wilkinson echoed his companion's laugh with a groan.

But ere Levee could remark on the subject somebody else laughed.

A horrible laugh.

Discordant.

Fiendish.

A laugh which he had too often heard not to immediately recognise.

The blood seemed to stand still in his veins, and the perspiration of intense fear broke out over his whole body.

* This incident is strictly true. "His accomplice and reputed wife, Mary Millner, having on some occasion provoked him, he straightway ran her through with his sword."—LIFE OF JONATHAN WILD.



[JONATHAN WILD TRIUMPHS, AND CAPTURES JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGORTH BESS.]

"Good God!" he gasped. "It's Jonathan!"

"Ha! ha!" said Wild again. "Ha! ha! Levee! I've cheated the hangman, you see. Ha! ha! but I don't fancy you will much longer. Ha! ha! Levee! Not much longer, I know!"

Most devoutly did the unfortunate man curse his own indiscretion. Most devoutly did he wish that the earth beneath his feet would at that moment yawn open, and swallow him up for ever.

The remainder of the men who had accompanied him in his unsuccessful chase after the three fugitives, stood just on the steps of the door, huddled into a dense throng, of course enjoying the scene mightily.

Now, so far as Jonathan himself was concerned, this was a lucky incident, for it had the effect of restoring him to his usual spirits.

But it boded no good for Mr. Levee.

"Come in, John," said Wild, for that was Levee's Christian name. "Come in, John! Don't be afraid! It

isn't my ghost! Ha! ha! I shall outlive more than one of my acquaintance! Ha! ha!"

Levee walked into the hall.

The remainder of the band followed.

Wilkinson closed the door.

Then, by the dismal, sickly light of an oil-lamp, which was suspended from the ceiling of the hall, they saw Jonathan standing near the foot of the stairs, with his hand upon the balusters.

For a moment, in his jocularly, he forgot what errand Levee had been upon, but when he saw the other members of the band enter a remarkable change took place.

"Where are they?" he yelled. "Have you let them slip through your fingers? Villains, I will make you rue this day."

"Mr. Wild."

"Well, wretch, what have you to say?"

"When you were thrown from your horse"—

"Ha! I was thrown?"

"You were fired at by Blueskin and Sheppard, Mr. Wild, when they made the sudden dash through us."

"Go on—go on."

"Seeing you fall I dismounted, for I feared you were killed."

"Feared?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Hoped, you mean. Go on, villain."

"I found you bleeding and quite insensible, so I ordered Flood and three others to take you home, while I pursued the fugitives."

"Well, and what then?"

"By the time I gained the saddle they were not only out of sight, but out of hearing also."

"Fool! why did you not follow them at once?"

"I acted as I thought for the best."

"Then you pursued and captured them."

"We pursued them, Mr. Wild."

"Of course."

"But we could not find the least trace of them. When we assured ourselves that such undoubtedly was the fact, we turned back, and here we are."

"And so Blake fired at me."

"And Sheppard too."

"Curse that devil's brat; it is he that has brought on all this mischief. But he shall swing—he shall swing. I swear it; and when I swear a thing I never fail to keep my oath. Jack and Blueskin both shall die at Tyburn. Ha! ha! they have triumphed so far, but I bid them beware, for Jonathan Wild will have his revenge—revenge—rev—"

His voice failed.

His legs gave way beneath him.

Jonathan fell like a log on the floor of the hall.

CHAPTER LXVI.

LORD DONMULL LISTENS TO JONATHAN'S INSIDIOUS ADVICE.

NATURE succumbed beneath Wild's terrible excitement. It is wonderful that he should so soon have recovered his strength as he had. It was the brandy that did it, and now that its effects had evaporated, he was left weaker than before.

Again were the services of Mr. Snoxall called into requisition, but this time when Jonathan recovered he turned over, and fell almost immediately into a deep slumber.

"That's right," said the apothecary, as he poured some narcotic down his throat. "Just let him sleep for twelve hours, or so, and then when he awakens ten to one if he is not all right."

Having thus spoken, Snoxall left the room quietly and shut the door, leaving instructions that his patient was on no account to be disturbed.

He then turned his attention to the woman, Mary Millner, whose condition was certainly much worse than that of her rascally husband.

During, then, the remainder of that night, and the whole of the following day, during which time the three fugitives talked over their affairs, and had the strange adventures we have recorded, Jonathan slept.

Slept, one would have thought, to gaze into his countenance, the sleep of innocence and peace, so deep and dream-like did it appear.

But it was exhaustion produced that effect, for, generally speaking, Wild was rather troubled with disagreeable dreams.

It was just as the shadows of evening were beginning to dusk the different objects in the room in which he lay, when Jonathan opened his eyes.

He still felt rather faint and dizzy, and his eyes rested languidly upon the familiar things by which he was surrounded.

This state of things he only endured for a very short space of time, for his brain began to assume its wonted action.

The pain of the pistol-wound in his face began to make itself felt.

He sprang off the bed, for he had only been lying on the outside of it he found, and going to a large pitcher and basin near the window, he poured some of the contents of the former into the latter, and plentifully bathed his head, neck, and face with it.

Jonathan had great faith in the therapeutic qualities of two agents.

One was brandy.

That was the inward application.

The other was cold water.

That was the outward one.

They were simple enough, in all conscience, and they always had the effect desired.

The intensely cold water soothed the irritation of his skin, and took away the dull oppressive feeling that was about his brain.

By the time he had finished, the twilight had given place to darkness, but he was well acquainted with the topography of his domicile, and he had no difficulty in finding his way down into his room on the first floor.

He seated himself in his accustomed chair in the chimney-corner, and then rang the bell.

Tonks appeared in answer to the summons.

He trembled when he first entered, but he gathered courage from the fact that he did not look so demoniacal as usual; in fact, that his face had rather a ghastly appearance than otherwise.

But it was not the less hideous on that account.

"Did you please to ring, Mr. Wild?"

"Of course I did, idiot, or else you would not have heard it. What is the time?"

"Five-and-twenty minutes to nine, Mr. Wild, sir, if you please."

"Ya—ah! Who has been here to-day?"

"A good many, sir, but they were all told to come to-morrow, owing to your serious indisposition. There is one gentleman just come."

"Who is he?"

"He would not tell me his name, Mr. Wild, but he told me to give you this letter, and ask for a reply."

Jonathan stretched out his hand, and tore open the envelope.

Inside there was nothing but a bank note for five pounds.

He turned it over, and on the back he saw the one word, "Donmull."

A shade of vexation crossed Jonathan's features, and crumpling up the note as though not of the least value, he thrust it into his pocket.

"And the gentleman that gave you that is waiting to see me, you say, Tonks, eh?"

"Yes, if you please, Mr. Wild."

"Of course I please, scoundrel! Ask the gentleman to step up, and let me advise you to be civil."

Rarely, indeed, was Wild in so temperate a mood, and Tonks took care to vanish while his shoes were good, as the saying is.

Two minutes afterwards he returned, and having ushered his lordship into the apartment, withdrew with great alacrity.

Steggs, of course, glided in after his employer.

Jonathan condescended to rise and motion them to a seat. Then he sat down again.

There was an awkward pause.

Lord Donmull broke it by saying the one word—

"Well?"

"I wish it was well, my lord."

"How do you mean? Speak. Tell us how you have got on. We have come to know whether you have fulfilled your promise."

Wild scowled.

"I have as yet got more peril than profit in the business. Curse it all! I have had them all but in my power, when a shot brought me to the ground."

Jonathan pointed to his bandaged face.

"I have only just recovered," he continued, "from the swoon."

"It is not very serious, I hope, Mr. Wild."

"No—no. The one that caused me this pain, though, shall suffer for it with interest."

"That is well."

"But come, let us to business. If you will excuse me, I should prefer our interview took place alone."

"Alone?"

"Just so, my lord."

"I have no secrets from Steggs."

"None," said that individual, who looked very angry at the very idea of his being sent away from the conference.

"That is very likely," replied Jonathan, dryly, "but I have."

"But, Mr. Wild."

"If you want to speak to me, my lord, I can only repeat what I have just said—our interview must take place in private, and I am sure Mr. Steggs would not wish to intrude."

Few could be more polite than Jonathan Wild when it suited him to be so.

Some whispered conversation now took place between his lordship and Steggs, which terminated in the latter leaving the room.

Jonathan touched the concealed handle of the bell.

Tonks appeared.

"Show this gentleman out, Tonks. Come back in an hour, Mr. Steggs."

Rage, impotent rage, swelled in the heart of the villain Steggs, as he followed Tonks down the stairs.

The idea entered his mind of bribing Tonks to listen to what took place between his lordship and Wild, but upon second thoughts he abandoned the idea.

As soon as the door was fairly closed, Lord Donnull turned an inquiring glance upon Jonathan Wild.

"You are surprised at my not allowing your confederate to be present. You will not, though, when you know my motive."

"Speak, Mr. Wild, speak!" cried his lordship, his guilty soul in an agony of apprehension. "What is your reason?"

"Simply this. He is not to be trusted."

"Not trusted?"

"You need not feel surprised, I know all."

His lordship turned several degrees paler than he usually was, and sank back in his chair.

"All what?"

"Your motives for wishing to obtain possession of this girl. Believe me, it would have been much better for you to have been candid with me at once."

"But—but—"

"There are no buts in the case! My lord, I am a man of few words, and those words are to the purpose. You will find it to your interest to trust me; I can be of great service to you. I will, too, be faithful, so long as you pay me well. But that fellow who has just left us has other designs in view."

"How do you know that, Mr. Wild?"

"I can read it in his face, my lord, without much attention. As a friend, and whether you go any further with me in this business, I say to you, beware of that man!"

Lord Donnull, in accordance with his usual nervous habit, when anything disturbed him, sprang to his feet, and paced up and down the room.

Jonathan eyed him with eager satisfaction.

"How much do you really know of this affair, Mr. Wild?" asked his lordship, pausing abruptly in front of the thief-taker.

"I have already told your lordship that I know all, and to convince you of the truth of my assertion, I need only say the girl you seek, and who is well known to me, is your eldest brother's only child, who was stolen from him in her infancy, and to whom he bequeathed the whole of the estates which you now hold. You wish this girl in your possession. Beyond that I seek to know nothing."

Without appearing to close his eyes, Jonathan Wild gazed narrowly into the countenance of his lordship, who little thought that he was then venturing upon still more dangerous ground.

Upon hearing this confirmation of his assertion that he did know all, Lord Donnull cast himself into the chair he had just before quitted.

"What are your terms, Mr. Wild?" he said, "supposing I made up my mind to employ you to carry out this business?"

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE NOBLEMAN AND THE THIEF-TAKER COME TO AN ARRANGEMENT WITH EACH OTHER, AND LEVEE IS CROSS-EXAMINED.

A SICKLY sort of smile distorted the visage of the thief-taker when this question was propounded to him. He knew he had another victim in the toils.

"I should be entitled to your lordship's consideration

upon too many distinct grounds," he said, avoiding a direct reply.

"Indeed. How so?"

"In the first place, there is catching the girl and placing her in your hands."

"Yes, yes."

"And in the second"—here Jonathan sank his voice to a whisper—"keeping to myself the secret of who she really is."

Lord Donnull shuddered, but he did not think in what a powerful position Wild would be placed if he obtained possession of the girl and kept her back from him. He would then be able to dictate what terms he chose.

"As for Steggs," said Wild, "I will undertake to dispose of him. You do not know me yet. From constant observation, and from the opportunities I have had of studying all kinds of people, I am generally able to read a person's character at a glance. My lord, that man is plotting against you. Instead of him being your tool, you are in reality his, and he will so manage matters as at last to get you completely into his power."

"If—if," stammered his lordship. "If I really thought you were right?"

"You are free to use your own judgment. Now, from the way in which you first came to me, I thought your business with the girl was a mere passing fancy you had taken for a pretty face, but in a couple of hours afterwards I was acquainted with the actual facts of the case."

"Is it possible?"

"Now, mylord, you would have found it by far your best policy if you had come to me and explained the whole matter fully, and then asked my assistance and advice."

Lord Donnull put his arms upon the table, and let his head fall upon them.

He was only half convinced of the truth of what his companion had just said. A vague sense of coming danger oppressed him, but whether he would escape it by deciding with or against the thief-taker he could not tell.

"You have not named your price, Mr. Wild," he said at length.

"Nor shall I, my lord. When I have performed the service, I shall leave my recompense for it to your own generosity."

"That sounds fair."

"I am glad you think so. Do you accept? If so, say at once. There is no time to lose. If you decide in the affirmative, and that, I can assure you, will be the best course for you to pursue to further your own interests, I shall set about the business without an hour's delay."

"But your wound?"

"That will not signify."

"You have a dauntless spirit and iron energy, Mr. Wild. Would I had—would I had."

"You naturally feel the precariousness of your situation. I can understand your anxiety; but make your mind easy. Leave all to me, and I will undertake that all shall turn out well."

The positive tone in which these words were uttered inspired Lord Donnull with a momentary gleam of hope.

Wild went on.

"It is now getting night. I am recovering from my wounds. In half-an-hour I shall be in pursuit of them."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Wild."

A smile of gratified vanity appeared upon the thief-taker's lips.

"Stop a moment, my lord. I will call in one of my men; and I will question him in your presence."

"And Steggs."

"My lord, I leave that matter entirely in your own hands. To me it is no matter which way you decide; but as a piece of friendly advice, which you will excuse my giving, as you have employed me in this matter, I say, for your own safety's sake, get rid of that man."

"But how—how?" asked his lordship, anxiously; "he knows all."

"There are means," said Wild, with grim significance, "by which his knowledge may be made of no avail."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. If you agree with what I have said say the word, and I will guarantee that Steggs never troubles you again."

Lord Donnull shuddered as he said—

"You would murder him!"

"That is an ugly word, my lord; I will put him out of the way."

"Enough, enough!"

"Do you consent?"

"I do."

"Then let me say disinterestedly you are wise. Just think; with your plans accomplished, and that man hanging upon you, what sort of life would yours be? No enviable one, certainly. Now when I am employed in a matter I expect to be paid upon its completion, and then I forget all about it."

"I leave it to your hands, then; heaven knows I have nothing to be thankful to him for. Before he came I was secure and happy, and now"—

"Now I suppose you possess neither! Do not despair, my lord; I will carry out this affair for you, and then all will be well again. I shall rely upon your gratitude as a recompense."

"You will have no cause for complaint, Mr. Wild. In a matter of this sort I should not be particular to a trifle."

"That is agreed, then; and now, as I said, I will call in my man, and you shall hear what he says in answer to my questions."

As he spoke, Wild again pressed the concealed handle of the bell.

"Send Levee up," he yelled, as Tonks just put his head inside the room.

There was a few moments' delay, and then Levee, in anything but an enviable frame of mind, made his appearance.

"I want to ask you some questions."

Levee glanced at Jonathan's visitor inquiringly as he replied—

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"You went with me in search of three persons."

"I did, Mr. Wild."

"We chased them along the Western-road, and, when near Ealing turnpike, the horse shied and threw me."

"That was when you were shot, Mr. Wild."

"Who fired?"

"Blueskin and Sheppard both."

"And what took place then?"

"They galloped on down the road. We did not follow them, but dismounted to look after you."

"What then, Levee?" asked Wild, with a hideous grin.

"Finding you were either insensible or dead, I gave orders for four of the band to take you home, and then remounting, the remainder of us set off in pursuit."

"Well?"

"We galloped on for hours, and kept the sharpest lookout, but they were not in sight or hearing when we started, and we failed to capture them."

"You hear," said Wild to Lord Donnull.

Then turning to Levee, he said—

"Where would they be likely to go. Have you any idea?"

"No, Mr. Wild, I haven't; but"—

"But what?"

"I think Wilkinson has."

"Why? how?"

"He dropped a hint to that effect, if you please, sir, and said if you would send for him he would tell you what he knew."

"That will do, then. Get ready half-a-dozen of you, and get me a horse. I will see if I cannot root them out. Send Wilkinson up at once."

Levee withdrew. The interview was a very different one to what he expected.

"This may be important, my lord," said Jonathan, as the door closed. "Wilkinson would not venture to send such a message unless he had something to communicate."

"I am glad of it."

"However, you shall listen to what he has got to say; but let things be how they may, I shall set off in pursuit."

"Mr. Wild!"

"My lord!"

"Should you object in any way to my forming a portion of your party?"

"By no means if you wish it."

"I do wish it, then. I think the excitement would do me good, and I should not be so full of suspense as I should be while waiting for intelligence."

"As you please. If this man can in some way put us on the right track, so much the better. Our task will then be easy; but, at any rate, I will scour all the country until I find them."

"I am glad you are so in earnest over the affair."

"I am determined. Not only is there your business to carry out, but I have a personal account to settle with those who are with her."

"As you please."

"That is nothing to you, my lord. I will put the girl in your hands; then I shall be done with it. I will take the two men, and you will be done with them."

"Exactly. One of them is, I think, the rascal that so assaulted me and robbed me of my watch."

"He is. But don't trouble about that. He shall acquit in full all obligations."

There was a momentary pause, and Wild again touched the handle of the bell.

Then both listened.

A rapid step ascended the stairs, and then some one tapped gently at the door.

"Come in!" roared Wild, "come in!"

In obedience to this command the door was opened, and Wilkinson crept into the room like one who was going to his death.

It was wonderful what a state of subjection Jonathan managed to keep his men in; but the fact was, there was not one who did not live entirely upon sufferance. He had the power of handing them over to the authorities, and then their conviction and execution or transportation followed as a matter of course.

And so Wilkinson, although he had important intelligence to communicate, trembled lest it should not be well received.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

WILKINSON GIVES JONATHAN WILD SOME VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION AS TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE FUGITIVES.

"SHUT the door," said Wild, "and then tell me what you have got to say."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"You told Levee that you thought you could form some idea of the place where the three fugitives have gone to?"

"I don't know about that, Mr. Wild; I will leave it to you, sir, if you please, as being the best judge."

"Go on," said Wild. "Let us hear what it is."

"I will, sir. You remember, of course, Geoffrey, as was tucked up two or three sessions ago?"

"What of him?"

"Why, he was always very great with Blueskin, and one day I happened to overhear what they were talking about."

"Well?"

"Geoffrey, if you please, Mr. Wild, was saying how he had arranged a secret place of refuge he would be able to fly to in case of any danger. It was a place, he said, where they would never think of looking to find him, and was quite a secret."

"Then what made him tell Blueskin?"

"Because they were friends, and he thought he might as well have the benefit of it as him, so he gave him a very particular description of it."

"Which you heard?"

"Which I heard, Mr. Wild."

"Be careful," said Jonathan; "this promises to be important. Tell me, what was this place?"

"He called it Tylney Abbey, Mr. Wild."

"Tylney Abbey, Tylney Abbey," repeated Jonathan. "I have heard that name. Where is it?"

"Just on the borders of Oxfordshire, I believe, sir."

"Well, you have not told us all now."

"No, Mr. Wild, I haven't. He described how you had to get to the ruins through a very large wood, and through the courtyard to the north turret. At the top of this north turret was the room he had prepared for the purpose of hiding in."

Jonathan sprang to his feet.

"This is news," he said, "indeed."

"From all I can hear," said Wilkinson, "they appears to have taken the direct road to this place, and I fancy it is just there where they would hide."

"You may depend upon it," said Wild. "Get ready to accompany us. We shall start directly. Order a horse, too, for this gentleman."

"If what you have said turns out to be right," said Lord Donnull, "I will take care you do not go unrewarded."

"Bah!" said Jonathan. "Be off."

Wilkinson disappeared.

Wild rubbed his hands gleefully, and an exultant smile appeared upon his features.

"We have them, my lord," he said. "We have them."

"You are confident."

"I feel I am right." It is just the place they would think the best to hide in."

"I only hope we shall be lucky enough to capture them, Mr. Wild. This fearful anxiety is killing me."

And no one to have looked in the haggard countenance of his lordship would have doubted his assertion, that it was indeed acting most prejudicially upon his health.

"Console yourself with the idea that your anxiety will soon be at an end."

"I hope so—I hope so."

"Are you ready, my lord?"

"Quite."

"Then we will start at once. You cannot think what a satisfaction it will be for me to get her companions into my power. But before we start let us defend ourselves against our long journey. Drink that!"

Jonathan, as he spoke, went to the cupboard and produced a bottle and two glasses.

He filled one for himself and one for his visitor.

"Let us drink success to our endeavours," cried Jonathan.

The two villains lifted the glasses to their lips, and emptied them at a draught.

Then Wild led the way down stairs.

On reaching the street they heard the clattering of horses' hoofs in the quiet street, and the next moment Lovee and the band rode up to the door.

There was a spare horse for Wild, and one for Lord Donnull.

These worthies sprang into their saddles at once.

"Now, Wilkinson," cried Wild, "where are you?"

"Here, sir, if you please."

"Very good. Keep close to me, and direct us."

At a sharp trot they took their way along Holborn to the Western-road.

This was a pace that enabled them to get over the ground at a very fair rate, without much exhausting the horses.

It was a long and weary ride, but at last they came in sight of the wood, and the tops of the ruins peering above it.

"According to the description, Mr. Wild," said Wilkinson, in reply to some remark the thief-taker had made to him; "according to the description I heard Geoffery give to Blueskin, that must be the place."

"We will inquire, if possible. Can you see a house hereabouts?"

"There is a cottage, yonder, if you please, Mr. Wild."

"Very good. Call at it."

The cottage turned out, on a nearer approach, to be one of those small country inns which are met with so frequently in England.

Its inmates appeared to be upon the point of retiring for the night when the party arrived.

Wild deemed it advisable to make a bit of a halt here. The horses would be all the better for a few minutes' rest and refreshment. There was the return journey to be made.

Ale was provided for the men, and Wild, by means of a few adroit inquiries, managed to elicit the information he required.

Not only did he learn that the ruins in the wood were those of Tyney Abbey, but also that the place was haunted by evil spirits.

Observing Jonathan smile contemptuously upon hearing this, the landlady, in confirmation, stated how during the past two nights a mysterious light had been seen in the north turret.

This seemed conclusive that the fugitives were really there, for that there was anything supernatural Wild did not for a moment believe.

"And I daresay," said the landlady, rather indignantly, "if you go to the door you will find the light visible. It was just at this time last night that we saw it."

"Oh! indeed," cried Jonathan. "Then I'll pay you for what we have had, and go to the door and see."

He did so, and the landlady rather triumphantly pointed to a stream of light which issued from the highest part of the ruins.

"There," she said, "that is the north turret, and there is the mysterious light. This is the second night of its appearance, and I know on the third something terrible will be sure to take place."

"I don't doubt that for a moment," said Jonathan. "Good night. Forward, forward!"

The little cavalcade was quickly in motion.

As they drew nearer to the wood, the light increased in brightness.

The reader is aware that this proceeded from the fire Blueskin had lighted.

Little did those three persons think, in whose well-doing we feel so great an interest, that they were upon the threshold of so much danger. They fancied themselves secure when they were really in the most peril.

So well had Wilkinson listened to and kept in mind the description given by Geoffery, that he was able to lead Jonathan and his party to the place with as much precision as Blueskin had.

So great was the exultation of the villainous thief-taker, that he had the greatest difficulty in concealing it.

Through the court yards of the old ruins they took their way.

Presently they came to the little enclosed garden where the two horses had been left.

If there had been any doubt lingering in Jonathan's mind, the discovery of the cattle in this place would have dispelled it.

They were on the right track now.

Whispering a command to his men to maintain as profound a silence as possible as they followed him, Jonathan crept stealthily to the door leading to the circular staircase in the north turret.

This door was not much of an obstacle to those who now wished to pass through it. With the aid of their tools they very quickly had it open.

Lord Donnull, when he thus found the enterprise he had come upon almost crowned with success, trembled so excessively that he could scarcely stand.

A draught of brandy from a flask Jonathan took from his pocket, and made him drink at the bottom of the steps, served a little to steady his nerves.

With a tread as silent as though they had been a band of spectres, they all with great caution ascended the turret steps.

It will be recollected by the reader that Jack suddenly interrupted himself in what he was saying, because he fancied he heard a slight sound from the direction of the staircase.

That was Lord Donnull, whose heel struck against the stonework.

Feeling that they were almost, if not quite, discovered, they bounded up the remainder of the stairs.

The door was dashed open.

Then, as stated at the end of a previous chapter, a number of armed men rushed into the chamber.

It required but one glance for Blueskin and Jack Shepard to realize the extent of their danger.

Jonathan Wild—that foe they had upon every account so much occasion to dread—had discovered the secret of their hiding-place.

CHAPTER LXIX.

EDGORTH BESS FALLS INTO THE HANDS OF HER WORST ENEMIES.

To place themselves in an attitude of defence was but the work of a moment.

Edgorth Bess uttered a shriek, and shrunk for protection behind her defenders.

Blueskin, as soon as he saw what an overwhelming force was opposed to him—that all possible retreat was cut off—gave up all hope.

That they could prove victorious was quite out of the question.

Nevertheless, he drew his hanger and pistols, and so did Sheppard, who had the same unpleasant conviction forced upon him.

They resolved to fight, and defend the young girl to the death.

Upon seeing his prey before him, like rats in a trap, a howl of rage and triumph burst from Jonathan's lips.

"Down with them!" he cried. "Take them prisoners, all. Down with them, I say."

Jonathan's heavy and sharp sword was in his grasp, and, as he uttered these words, he precipitated himself upon our two friends.

In this attack he was backed up by his men.

Jack and Blueskin stood shoulder to shoulder firmly, and repulsed the assault as well as they were able.

In obedience to previously given instructions none of Wild's men used fire-arms. His object was to take all three prisoners.

The clashing of swords—the trampling of footsteps, and the hoarse cries of the combatants—were terrific, and made the old ruin positively tremble beneath them.

Lord Donnull stood without.

Either from cowardice or else shame at the foul part he was playing.

But such a combat as this, where the advantages were all on one side, could not be of long duration.

Blueskin opposed himself to Wild.

The former was cool, steady, and determined.

They both seemed maddened with fury.

"Die, wretch!" he cried, as he lifted his sword, and grasped the hilt with both his hands. "Die, villain!"

Blueskin put up his weapon to ward off the blow, but it was impossible.

The mere force with which it was brought down was more than sufficient to break through all guard.

Down came Jonathan's sword upon Blueskin's head.

His sharp edge cut through his cap and scalp.

He fell down as though he had been struck with a sledge-hammer.

Blood in an immense quantity gushed from the wound; and dyed the floor.

At the moment he fell, the men who had been struggling with Jack closed upon and captured him.

But he struggled fiercely in their grasp.

It was, however, unavailingly.

Joy sparkled in the eyes of Jonathan Wild, as, darting forward, he clasped Bess in his arms.

It was in vain she struggled to free herself.

She uttered shriek upon shriek.

But in the arms of the thief-taker she was like a dove in the talons of a hawk.

Seeing her thus taken filled Jack with the utmost fury, and the attempts he made to extricate himself were really superhuman.

For a moment he did succeed in getting his right arm free.

He struck out furiously with it.

But before he could achieve any advantage it was again held behind him.

"Ha! ha!" said Jonathan, as he dragged his shrieking victim through the doorway. "Ha! ha! Jack, you see what you get by setting yourself up in opposition to me. Ha! ha!"

To this speech Jack deigned no reply.

"Bring him along, bull-dogs," yelled Wild, as he began the descent of the stairs; "bring him along, and if he escapes you shall all swing for it—mind that."

This threat, which they well enough knew was no idle one, made them tighten their hold upon Jack.

A pair of handcuffs were with professional dexterity slipped over his wrists.

Then a belt, which one of Wild's men took from round his waist, was passed between Jack's back and elbows and buckled tightly.

This left him utterly defenceless, if we may except his feet.

They dragged him down the staircase after Jonathan Wild.

Blueskin they left for dead upon the floor.

It was scarcely possible for any one to survive such a blow upon the crown as that was.

So suddenly had all this taken place that Jack had some

difficulty in fully realizing the change of circumstances which had taken place.

As for Jonathan, his delight knew no bounds.

He had succeeded better than even he anticipated.

When the men who had Jack in charge reached the little enclosed garden they found Jonathan waiting for them.

Bess had fainted.

"Villain!" cried Sheppard, his voice husky with rage and emotion; "villain, you have killed her!"

"Ha! ha!"

There was something horrible in the way Wild made this reply, and Jack felt the blood boil in his veins as he heard it.

"You triumph now," he said, "but it will not be for long. The time will soon arrive when you will bitterly repent what you have done to-night."

"Go on," said Jonathan, with a coolness that made Jack almost mad; "go on; I like to hear you. One thing is certain—you won't have the chance of crowing much longer."

As he spoke, he gave the word to his men, and they set off through the wood.

On reaching its outskirts they mounted.

Edgworth Bess was still insensible.

Jonathan gave her in charge of one of his janizaries for a moment while he mounted, and then he placed her on the saddle before him.

Jack now commenced another desperate struggle, but it was in vain.

Despite all the resistance he could offer, he was lifted on to the back of one of the horses.

A cord was placed round his ancles, and his feet drawn together by it under the horse's belly.

He was then perfectly helpless.

One of the men, however, got up behind him.

His chances of escape were few indeed.

"Forward!" cried Mr. Wild. "Mind your prisoner. If he escapes you know the penalty. My lord!"

"Yes, Mr. Wild," replied Lord Donnull.

"Ride close to me. You see I am right. I have succeeded."

"You have. And now what is next to be done?"

"That point is for your own consideration. We can talk of it as we go."

Lord Donnull was silent.

A multitude of thoughts came thronging through his brain.

After the pause had lasted some time Wild spoke.

"Will you excuse me," he said, "if I make you a suggestion?"

"What is it, Mr. Wild?"

"You will not take it amiss, I hope."

"I cannot do that. I am already deeply indebted for your advice. What were you about to say?"

"This. But you must promise to keep a secret."

"Agreed."

"I have in my house in Newgate-street, or beneath it I ought perhaps to say, some cells."

"I have had as much whispered to me."

"Indeed. By whom?"

"Steggs."

"Oh! never mind. I was going to tell you in one of those cells this girl may be safely and secretly deposited until such time as you make up your mind concerning her."

"Be it so, Mr. Wild. It is the very thing I should have desired."

"I am glad my suggestion meets with your approval, my lord."

"Treat her gently, Wild; treat her gently. I am not so bad as to wish unnecessary pain inflicted on her, nor—"

"What?"

"Do I wish her death?"

"You do not?"

"No. If she could be induced in some way to legally transfer the estates to me I would spare her life, and not only that, allow her a good yearly income."

"You will have time to think upon it, for, as I understand, you have determined to place her for a short time in my keeping."

"I have, Wild, I have. If you will carry out my instructions."

"That you may rely upon."

"Treat her, then, with no unnecessary rigour. Let no one know of her existence. It may be that the solitude of a dungeon will induce her to comply with my demands."

"It is probable, and well worth a trial."

"I think so. And now, Wild, good night. We perfectly understand each other. I can trust you to take her to your house in safety. Good night."

"Good night, my lord."

Lord Donnull rode off in the direction of his residence.

"Fool!" muttered Wild, as he looked after him, "fool! I have you now completely in my power. You shall yet learn what Jonathan really is. Fortune smiles on me to-night. I shall do well out of this. Forward, there, with the prisoner!"

CHAPTER LXX.

JACK SHEPPARD FOR THE FIRST, BUT NOT FOR THE LAST TIME, SEES THE INTERIOR OF NEWGATE.

DAY was just about to dawn when Jonathan and his band with the two prisoners trotted up Snow-hill.

He first directed his course to his own residence.

Levee knocked at the door, and then sprang to Wild's side to assist him with his burden.

As soon as he reached the ground Jonathan again took the young girl in his arms. It was evident he considered her a possession of no small value.

Jack, meanwhile, was forced to remain motionless upon his horse.

He would have shouted for assistance had he the power, but they had taken care to gag him securely before they entered London.

They left him the use of his eyes, and he watched Jonathan carry Edgworth Bess into the gloomy precincts of that house from which he had with so much difficulty and danger escaped.

The agony he then endured was beyond all expression, and upon finding himself so utterly powerless, can it be wondered at that despair took possession of his heart.

He was quite at a loss to think why he was kept in the street; why he, too, was not hurried into that mysterious abode.

He soon knew, and the knowledge made him still more downcast than before.

We will follow Jonathan.

Stalking down the passage, he called out for the iron grating leading to the cells to be thrown open.

Then he descended the steps, and pursued that route which must be already familiar to our readers.

At the door of one of the cells he paused, and taking a key from his pocket, he opened it.

It happened to be situated in the immediate vicinity of the oil lamp that was always kept burning in that underground passage, so that when he threw open the door some of the beams from it found their way into the dungeon, and revealed its cheerless aspect.

Comparatively, however, it was much more comfortable than many of the dungeons were. The walls and floor were tolerably free from moisture, and in one corner was a quantity of clean straw.

Upon this he rapidly and carefully deposited his insensible burden.

It was impossible for Jonathan to conceal his intense exultation.

Plans of aggrandizement, of power, flitted quickly through his brain, and the more he reflected, the more pleased did he seem.

But having assured himself that her swoon was nothing but a fainting fit, induced by flight, he left her to recover herself.

He closed and locked the door of the cell, and then hastily made his way to the door.

"Dismount," he cried. "Take care of the prisoner."

The men at once flung themselves from their horses, and unbound Jack, but they took care to keep a tight hold of him.

"This way," yelled Wild, as he walked down Newgate-street towards the Old Bailey, "this way. Come on."

They hurried after him.

Jack shuddered when his gaze fell upon the huge black prison.

The door by which prisoners entered was quickly reached.

Jonathan himself knocked at the portal.

The sliding shutter that covered the small grated aperture was, according to custom, dashed aside.

Some angry question was doubtless upon the top of his lips, but the light of the lamps that hung over the doorway fell upon Wild's face, and enabled the man to see who the applicant for admission was.

The door was opened with astonishing quickness, for Wild just then was held greatly in awe by all the Newgate officials.

In fact, the governor of the prison and Jonathan were in collusion together, and it was well-known that a complaint from Jonathan was sure to be the means of getting them into trouble.

Hence he was treated with a civility and deference that he would never, under other circumstances, have received.

Jonathan, as soon as the door was opened, walked into the vestibule, and beckoned his men to bring their prisoner up the steps.

This was done, and then the door was closed with a bang.

It seemed to Jack as though it shut him out entirely from the world.

"Send for Mr. Noakes," cried Wild, in his most ferocious tones, "and tell him to be quick, curse you!"

The man vanished.

Mr. Noakes was the name of the then governor of Newgate.

Now this gentleman happened just then to be in bed; but, upon hearing it was Jonathan Wild who had summoned him, he hastened to put on his clothes.

Five minutes later, and rather picturesquely attired, he made his way into the lobby.

"Look here, Mr. Noakes," said Wild, "here is a young man I want you to take particular care of."

"Very good, Mr. Wild. Of course. Pope and Bain, see to Mr. Wild's prisoner."

Pope and Bain, two of the turnkeys, took charge of Jack, and they found him by no means easy to hold.

But they were used to that sort of thing.

"And now, Mr. Wild," said the governor, "what is the prisoner's name, and what is the charge you have against him?"

"One question at a time," said Wild, as he produced his pocket-book and wrote something on the leaf. "His name is John Sheppard. The charge against him is a burglary."

"That's quite sufficient, Mr. Wild, quite sufficient. Put the prisoner in a strong cell, and see that he does not make his escape."

"Yes," added Jonathan, "use every precaution. I can assure you, you will find him a very troublesome customer."

"All right, Mr. Wild, I'll see that he is taken care of. I'll wager my head he don't get out."

"What? Will you?" said Jack, speaking for the first time.

"Wager your head I don't get out."

"What do you mean by talking to me?"

"Ask my elbow. But I'll bet my hand against your stupid old head that I do get out of here. Come now!"

The top of the governor's nose grew quite purple with rage at this audacity upon the part of the prisoner.

"Off with him," he cried. "Load him with irons! Escape indeed! I'll see about that."

Wild in his heart was rather amused, though he did not allow his countenance to give token of it.

"I would advise you to keep a sharp eye upon him, Mr. Noakes," he said, as the turnkeys hustled Jack off down a passage.

"A sharp eye. Confound his impudence to wager his hand to my head! He's inexperienced yet, Mr. Wild, or else he would know better than be at enmity with the governor."

"Well," said Wild, "from what I know of him I firmly believe he would not care a jot either for your friendship or your enmity. He has too independent a spirit by half. I would give a trifle to bend him to my schemes. He would be invaluable, but there is little hope, I am afraid."

"Of course that's your affair, not mine," replied the governor. "What do you intend to do with him? The sessions will soon be on, you know."

"They will, I'll take care about that. There is my

authority to keep him in charge. I will take him before the magistrate to-morrow morning."

"All right, Mr. Wild. Good night."

"Good morning," growled Jonathan, as he passed through the wicket into the Old Bailey, and walked towards his own house.

In the meantime, Jack had been hurried along a number of passages, and up and down numerous flights of steps, until his brain grew bewildered in the attempt to remember the route by which he had come.

They paused at length before a small but massive door.

The wood of which it was made was oak, strengthened in every way the imagination could suggest by bands and rivets of iron.

It was fastened by means of an iron bar, two huge iron bolts, one at the top and one at the bottom, and a lock that must have weighed a quarter of a hundred weight at least.

The key that the jailer produced to unlock it with was really quite a formidable-looking piece of metal, and, in desperate hands, would have formed an effective weapon.

This huge key was then inserted into the still huger lock, and Bain, applying both his hands, and putting out the whole of his strength, shot back the bolt.

The other fastenings were then undone, and Jack was very roughly thrust into the dungeon.

But he expected some such trick to be played him, and was on his guard accordingly; but in spite of that, he reached the hard stones with rather a heavy fall, for his hands, being secured together as they were, were unable to save him from the effects of the fall.

Bain went the door, and then Jack was half conscious that the bolts were shot into their sockets, and the bar put up.

But the force with which he came into contact with the stones deprived him partially of the use of his faculties.

He soon recovered himself, however, from the effects of that, and he raised himself painfully to his feet.

He knew when he last looked up at the sky that the dawn of the new day was visible, but all around him now was as black as the very grave itself.

In a few minutes afterwards he saw a light shining beneath his dungeon door, and heard the sound of voices and feet in the corridor without.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE STRONGEST CELL IN ALL NEWGATE PROVES NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO RETAIN ITS INMATE.

JACK SHEPPARD had for the moment quite forgotten the governor's instructions about the irons, and that those instructions had not been carried out, so he was at a loss to know the meaning of this sudden visit.

When he saw them enter his cell, he immediately remembered it, and comprehended.

He was too much hurt by his fall to make much resistance to the irons being riveted upon his limbs, but still he took care not to let them see he was in any way injured.

The operation of putting on the fetters was very quickly performed.

Jack was freed from the handcuffs, and also from the belt that confined his arms behind his back.

For this he felt thankful, and his irons were almost pleasant in comparison.

No one who has not known what it is to have the arms bound tightly in one position for many hours can tell what a dreadful feeling it is.

Just as the last rivet was put in and the smith picked up his tools, the governor entered the dungeon, in order to assure himself by personal observation that his commands had been properly carried out.

He even walked up to the prisoner, and felt that the joints were all secure.

"You needn't take so much pains, it will amount to the same thing in the end."

"What do you mean?"

"You are evidently afraid that I shall win my bet, and so I shall!"

"Then you will have a little more trouble, that's all," said the governor, with a coarse laugh at his own wit, in

which, of course, out of compliment, the two jailers and the smith heartily joined.

"You may laugh;" said Jack, "but when you find yourself with your ugly old head off, you'll change your note, I'm thinking."

"Come away," said the governor. "Come away, and leave him to it."

"Good-bye, then, for I tell you, you won't see me again until I come to claim the stake."

The door was banged, shut, and then the three retreated.

When they had fairly gone, a great change took place in Jack's behaviour.

A few rays of daylight now struggled in through the grated window, and made the different objects in the dungeon visible.

He seated himself upon the stone bench that was in it, leaning his head between his hands.

There he was loaded with so much iron as to make the least motion almost impossible, in the strongest cell in the strongest prison in England, with people doubtless keeping a sharp eye upon his movements.

But it was not so much of himself as of his companion, Edgeworth Bess, that he thought.

There she was in peril, doubtless of her life, surrounded by those anxious for her destruction, while he was powerless to help her.

This was a thought that drove him almost to distraction.

Then his mind reverted to Blueskin, the only other person in the world that the young girl could look upon as a defender.

Where was he?

A bleeding corpse. Another victim to Jonathan's brutality. The sole occupant now of the little chamber at the top of the turret in the old abbey ruins.

Jack fairly groaned as all these things forced themselves upon him.

"What shall I do?" he cried, as he threw himself back upon the hard stone seat. "What shall I do? Escape! Yes, that is it. In a moment of bravado I said that I would escape, and I will keep my word."

A great deal is actually accomplished when we make up our minds to anything, and so Jack found.

He had firmly resolved to escape, let the difficulty be what it might.

As well as he could, he looked about him at the different objects in the cell.

The walls were composed of immense pieces of stone, upon which had been engraved initials and the names of celebrated characters who had found there a temporary resting-place.

A step led up to the strong door, which on the inside was covered with one sheet of iron tightly secured by innumerable rivets to the wood.

To have looked at such an obstacle to freedom would, one would have thought, have daunted the most sanguine.

From this door Jack's eyes roved to the window.

It was as high up in the wall as it well could be, and was divided into little squares by horizontal and perpendicular iron bars.

Through this came the first rays of the coming daylight.

There was little encouragement to be got from that—so little, that Jack turned his gaze upon the door again.

He rose to his feet.

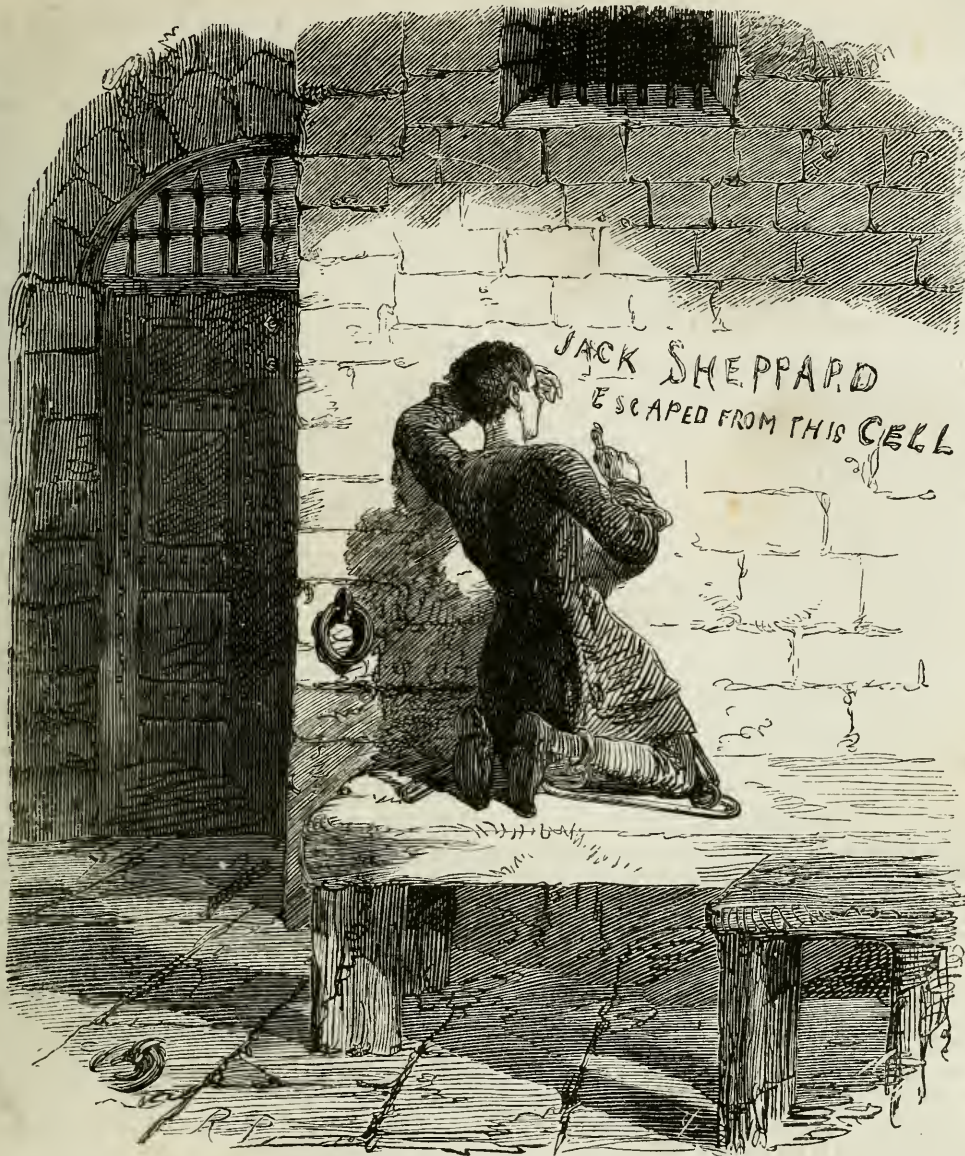
"The door," he said; "that is the only chance I have. Curses on the villain Jonathan! But he shall repent when I am free. How came he to discover our retreat?" he added. "He walked up as though he knew exactly where to find us. Can it be possible that he has the power of knowing what is going on without seeing it? No, no; I will not think that."

As these words reached his lips, he reached the cell-door.

He looked at it in every part with the closest attention. Then he passed his hands over it, especially the sides.

He tried to shake the door, but it did not move the least in its setting.

A calm spectator of the scene would at once have pronounced it an impossibility for him to get free, even though he was provided with tools best suited to the purpose.



[JACK SHEPPARD TAKES HIS FIRST STEP TO ESCAPE.]

But Jack himself was of quite a different opinion.

"I'll do it," he said, "but the first thing necessary will be to get rid of this jewelry."

He strode back to the stone-bench, and sat down again.

Then, diving his hand into his pocket, he produced a small, strong file.

Now, before he was placed in the dungeon, in accordance with the invariable custom of the prison officials, he had been thoroughly searched, and his pockets emptied.

How came he, then, with the file?

It was owing to a little manual dexterity.

While the smith was busily engaged in riveting on his irons, he had managed to steal the tool, and put it into his pocket unseen.

A smile of triumph overspread his face, as he examined the file, and found what a good one it was.

"With this," he cried, "I would make my way out of a thousand Newgates. The governor will lose his bet; but first let me get free from these fetters."

His first care was to find out which was the weakest

part of the iron-work, and this he was not long in doing.

It was there he determined to commence, but he found, as he drew the sharp edge of the file rapidly across the iron, that a sound was produced which sounded most alarmingly distinct in that quiet place.

He paused, and the perspiration started out in large drops upon his forehead at the thought that some turnkey might be in the passage without, and heard the sound.

He listened with the utmost intentness.

To his great satisfaction, he found the silence unbroken by the least sound indicative of the presence of his jailors.

"That's well," he said, in a tone which showed how greatly his mind was relieved, "that's well; I must try to prevent the noise if I can. A little grease now would be the very thing, but its no good thinking about anything of that sort; I must hit upon some other plan. Suppose, now, I was to sing; I should think that would be the best way to drown the noise of the file."

No sooner did the thought occur to him than he proceeded to try it.

I struck up one of those flash ballads of which there were so many about the middle of the last century.

His voice was a powerful one, and he exerted it to the utmost.

As might be expected, the noise of the file was quite inaudible.

Perceiving this, he worked away with right good will, maintaining his singing with uncommon vigour, and very soon, to his delight, he found the file had made quite a deep dent in the soft iron of which the fetters were composed.

At the rate he was going on, of course he soon had one of the bands all but divided.

Then he paused, and began at another place.

So he went on until he was convinced that in less than five minutes he could quite free himself from them, though to a casual glance it would seem they were quite secure.

By this time day had fully come, and the interior of his cell was tolerably light.

"It would have been better," he thought, as he glanced up at the grated window, "to have waited until night before I began. However, it can't be helped now: I must wait! I'll hide the file somewhere, and then trust to concealing how I have worked at my fetters, for I am sure to have some visitors in the course of the day."

He found it, though, a very difficult job to hide it, for the floor, like the walls, was composed of solid stone, and did not permit of its being buried.

He wasted at least an hour fruitlessly, when the sound of approaching footsteps warned him to be prompt.

One corner of the cell was in much deeper shadow than the rest, so he made his way there, and stuck the file upright in the corner.

This, it must be confessed, was a very artificial hiding-place, and where, if any search was made, it would be certainly found, but still it was the best there was.

He sat down again quickly, and then, the fastenings having been undone, the door of the dungeon was thrown open.

CHAPTER LXXII.

JACK SHEPPARD CARVES HIS NAME UPON THE NEWGATE CELL, AND THEN SETS ABOUT MAKING HIS ESCAPE.

JACK SHEPPARD displayed a good deal of skill in the manner in which he managed to dispose himself upon the seat, so that the state of his fetters should not be perceptible.

But on this occasion, at least, his cleverness, as a great deal often is, was thrown away, for the man who came to the door, and whose duty it was to supply the prisoners with food, just put a loaf and a stone-pitcher inside, and, without even looking at Jack, departed.

In the silence of the place, he heard the man visit several other adjoining cells.

The sight of the food, coarse and untempting as it was, provoked Jack's appetite, and as he knew he could not hope for success if his strength failed him, he made a hearty meal, and drank plentifully of the water, which he found to be tolerably fresh.

"I only hope now," he said, "that, in their amazing civility, they won't come troubling me with any more visits. If they don't, I shall be all right enough. Curses on Jonathan Wild, but he shall live to repent this night's work. When I think that Bess, too, is in his power, and in that of her rascally uncle, I feel as though I was going mad. Will night never come?" he added, as, unable to sit still any longer, he rose, and paced the cell. "I am out of all patience."

But, alas! his patience was destined to be put to a more severe trial. The day had but just begun, and many a weary hour must necessarily elapse before night came again.

He knew too well the utter futility of attempting to make his escape, except under the cover of darkness, and so chafed and fretted like some wild animal confined in a cage.

As the day advanced he grew calmer, and was able to take an exact survey of his present position.

How many stirring and exciting scenes he had gone through since that night when, with wild curses and

threats of revenge, he had left his master's roof! How greatly was he changed!

About mid-day, the governor, Mr. Noakes, paid a visit to the cell.

He found the prisoner in all appearance in a state of the greatest possible dejection.

This was partly real, partly assumed.

Jack feared that if he seemed too bold it might result in an examination being made of the state of his fetters, which was the thing he had most of all to dread.

"Well, my spark," cried Mr. Noakes, "not gone yet, I see! But I'm not afraid, and I should not have come now only to deliver a rather important message."

"A message?" repeated Jack.

"Yes, and as I say, an important one."

"Who from?"

The governor looked round carefully, and then said in a loud whisper—

"Jonathan Wild!"

"Curse him, I say, curse him!"

"Will you listen to the message?"

Jack was silent.

The governor chose to interpret his silence as consent.

"Jonathan Wild," he said, "has commissioned me to say to you that he did not come to-day to take you before the beak, because he was desirous of giving you an opportunity of having a little calm reflection."

"How kind!"

"He hopes you will have wisdom enough to come to terms with him to-morrow, when he will make some proposals to you. If you consent, why of course you will be set free, if not"—

The governor made an expressive movement with his fingers across his throat, uttering a clucking sound at the same time, intended to intimate the consequences that would result from Jack's refusal.

"Tell him I'll think matters over, according to his request," said the prisoner, at length; not that he had the remotest intention of coming to any arrangement with Wild, only he thought it would afford him a better opportunity of making his escape.

"That's right and reasonable," said the governor; "you'll find it your best plan. Jonathan speaks of you in the highest terms, and, let me tell you, if you value your neck you had better be friends with Mr. Wild than enemies."

This was a gratuitous piece of advice which Jack did not deem worthy of a reply, and observing his silence, Mr. Noakes turned on his heel and left the place.

"That's over," said Jack. "Jonathan, I'm much obliged to you. All I want now is darkness."

But many hours yet he knew must pass before he could have what he required.

He strove to sleep, but his thoughts were too busy to allow him to do so.

He did, however, by maintaining a recumbent posture, and resolutely closing his eyes, manage to fall into a doze.

A long weary time to him seemed to pass, and then a thought entered his mind.

He rose to his feet.

"I will leave something behind me to show I have been here," he said. "I wish I had thought of it before, it would have found me something to do. Still it is not too late."

While speaking these words, Jack went to the corner where he had deposited the file.

Then he glanced at the walls around him.

Just over the stone bench on which he sat there was a smooth piece of stonework.

"That's the place," he cried. "Plenty more have cut their names on the old walls, and why shouldn't I? I will, too, or my name's not Jack Sheppard! This file has got quite a sharp point, and it will do the business beautifully!"

His next proceeding was to kneel upon the stone bench.

"Let me see," he said, "there's plenty of room, so I will begin here, and in case they should be deaf, I'll make the letters a good size."

With a laugh at what he was pleased to conceive his wit, Jack Sheppard commenced his task.

He found the stone gave way easily before the file, and before many minutes elapsed he had scratched an enormous capital J upon the wall.

He scraped away most industriously, being fully determined that the marks should not wear out in a hurry.

Having finished the J, he paused awhile to contemplate his handiwork, and feeling satisfied therewith, set about the next letter with great energy and good will.

In something less than an hour he had managed to cut, in great straggling letters, the name—

JACK SHEPPARD.

Then, getting down off the bench, he retired to a little distance in order that he might see the name to the greatest advantage.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in a tone which showed how gratified he was with what he had done. "It will be many a long year before that wears out, I know, if ever it does. Bravo! How well the name looks, to be sure; but there's plenty of room to put something else. Let me see. What shall it be now? Oh! I know," he added, after a moment's thought, "that is a capital idea?"

Away he went to work, and cut the letters, "escaped from this cell September" — and then he stopped.

"Whatever, now, is the day of the month? Let me think. Oh! yes. Its the eighth. I'll put September the eighth!"

A gigantic figure 8 now made its appearance on the wall, and then followed the year, so that, in its entirety, the inscription ran thus, though, of course, not in very well-formed letters—

Jack Sheppard escaped from this cell September 8, 1721.

"Now," he cried, "I think that about as daring a thing as ever anyone did, for I am a long way from having escaped yet, though I must do so, or else they will have the laugh against me. Thank goodness, its dark at last."

The shadows of evening were now creeping over the cell, and by the time he had taken one more look, the last rays of lingering daylight faded quite away.

But for all that it was not time for him to begin any active operations. The night rounds had to be made; but that over, all would be well.

Fortunately he had not long to wait, for they were made always soon after sunset, and then again at midnight, so he counted upon having four hours undisturbed.

Some more bread and water was put into the cell, and a glance given to the prisoner, to see that he was safe.

So he was, to all appearance, and they left him.

No sooner had they gone, than Jack sprang to the door.

"Its no good trying to get *through* that," he said. "Its a great deal too strong for anyone to think of such a thing, but I don't think it will be so very hard to get *under* it. Here goes for a try, at any rate."

We have before had occasion to remark, that the cell was paved with large stone flags.

With the point of the file, then, Jack began to pick out the mortar from between the interstices of the one immediately under the middle of the door.

The dampness of the place had had the natural effect of softening the cement, so that he found the job easy enough, and in a few minutes he had dug completely round the stone, so that all which now remained was to raise it from its position.

Finding all quite silent, he proceeded to disencumber himself of his fetters.

Half-a-dozen strokes, in as many different places, was sufficient to do this.

He placed them carefully on the floor.

Selecting, then, the longest piece of iron in all the lot, he went to work to cut it out.

His intention was to use it as a crowbar.

This, too, was a quickly-performed operation, which he had wisely deferred until the present moment. The sharp steel file cut into the iron, as a saw would into wood.

At the expiration of half-an-hour, he found himself in possession of a piece of iron about ten inches in length, and three-quarters of an inch in diameter.

By the aid of this he calculated upon raising the stone. The only fear he had was that it would bend beneath the weight of it.

This apprehension he soon found was groundless. He inserted one end into the crevice, and by using the lever gently, contrived to lift the stone, so that he could pass his fingers under the edge of it.

Exerting, then, all his strength, he, although the weight of it was tremendous, fairly lifted it up, and turned it at once on to the floor.

With some anxiety he now struck at the earth with his file, and was rejoiced to find it was of a tolerably soft character. He was afraid he would find it too hard to force a passage through.

But it was merely stones and earth tightly packed.

A laborous task, nevertheless, was before him.

His intention was to dig quite under the door, and then, by lifting up another stone, emerge into the passage beyond.

And all the tools he had with which to execute this arduous task were a file and a piece of soft iron, not a foot in length; yet he confidently looked forward to success.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD SUCCEEDS IN ESCAPING FROM HIS CELL, AND HAS AN ENCOUNTER WITH A TURNKEY IN THE PASSAGE.

As though he had some mortal enemy beneath his dagger, Jack stabbed fiercely with his file into the hard impacted ground.

When he considered he had loosened a sufficient quantity, he set to work with his hands to scoop it out.

And so, with unwearying perseverance and untiring energy, he continued at his work for full an hour, at the end of which time he had made an excavation large enough for him to creep under the door.

He had feared that he should find, connected in some way with the foundations of it, some impediment that would have obstructed his escape. But no, there appeared to be nothing of the kind, or if there was he had dug beneath it.

His task could scarcely be said to be half accomplished. The most difficult portion of it by far was yet to come.

The incredible exertion he had made compelled him to desist awhile, and regain his breath.

He wiped the perspiration from his head and face. To have looked at him, one would have thought he had but just emerged from a vapour bath.

Not for long, though, did he allow himself to remain inactive. There was no time to lose, and the amount of peril and hard work he had yet to go through, were sufficient to appal anyone.

He sprang into the hole again, and began his work.

Fortune at last seemed to favour him.

The earth under the stones in the passage was not near so hard, nor was it so full of small flint stones, as that beneath the dungeon floor.

The consequence was that in a short time, and without much adding to his fatigue, he had the satisfaction of seeing the under surface of one of the stone slabs above his head.

He next proceeded to seek for the crevice round it.

This found, he carefully picked away the mortar on three of the sides.

Then, standing upon the mound of earth, he put his back to the slab, and mustering all his strength, slowly and steadily raised it from its position.

In his hands he held two different portions of his fetters, which he placed under the stone as he raised it, so as to prevent it falling back into its former setting.

By this means he managed to get it so far raised as to be able to squeeze his slim body through.

A sickly sensation came over him as he did so, for the thought occurred to him that, should the mass of stone slip, a frightful death would be the result.

But he got through in safety, and stood in the corridor of the old prison comparatively a free man.

"So far all is well," he said, resting against the wall to recover himself again. "I have escaped from the cell at any rate. They will be rather struck when they come in the morning and find that lax—hole there, and wonder how I made it."

"And now," he added, "what step shall I take next? If I turn to the left that will take me to the door at the end of the corridor through which they brought me. That will be well secured, of course. I must get through it somehow, unless I can find an easier way out by turning to the right. I will try, at any rate."

This passage, it must be understood, was in profound darkness, but yet, from having been so long in it, assisted, perhaps, by some peculiarity of vision, he was enabled to see dimly about him.

He crawled stealthily and slowly to the right along the passage.

"Oh!" he said, "if I only had a light. I should think it as easy as possible then. But its no good wishing for what I can't have, so I must do the best I can without it."

Just as he spoke these words he reached the end of the passage.

He moved his hands carefully over the smooth surface in the hope of finding a door, but nothing save the cold smooth stones met his touch.

"That's the end of the passage, I suppose, and getting through that wall would be quite out of the question."

So he thought.

But he never made a greater mistake in his life.

Oh! if some friendly power had whispered in his ear the intelligence that if he had set to work upon that wall, and made a breach in it, it would have taken him into the cell beneath Wild's house, in which she whom he loved more than life itself was deposited, how quickly and energetically he would have set about it!

But there was nothing to tell him this.

He was quite ignorant of what part of the prison he was confined, and whether the wall before him was in the north, east, south, or west portion of it.

It was in the eastern portion.

Little did he think, as he stood there, passing his hands over the stonework, that a distance of a few inches only intervened between him and Edgworth Bess.

But it often happens in life that when we are nearest the object we most desire we know it not.

Convinced that there was no egress in that direction, Jack Sheppard turned and retraced his steps along the passage until he reached the door of his own cell.

Then he knew that about forty paces onwards would bring him to the strong, iron-bound door at the entrance of the passage.

Stepping with as much care as possible, on he went.

When the jailers had conveyed him to the dungeon he had taken particular notice of the different objects in his route. He thought then such attention would not be thrown away, and the result proved that he was right.

He remembered, then, that when he passed the corridor door he had descended a short flight of steps.

Consequently he would have these to ascend.

This made him so cautious in his progress. He was afraid he should come upon them unexpectedly and fall, which might, perhaps, not only give the alarm, but also do him so much injury as to incapacitate him from fully achieving his escape.

He lifted his feet only the least bit in the world, and slid them over the stones.

At last his toe struck against the bottom step.

He was all right now, and he ascended the little flight of steps rapidly and easily.

They were five in number.

Upon reaching the top one he put out his hand and touched the door.

"I wonder now," he thought, as the idea occurred to him, "I wonder, now, whether there is anyone the other side of the door? If there is it will be awkward—very awkward indeed! I will listen."

He stooped, and placed his ear close to the panel.

At first all was silent, and he was about to rise, under the conviction that there was no one on the other side, when a faint sound, like the shutting of a door, reached his ears.

He again put his ear to the panel.

Then he heard distinctly a heavy tread, which sounded dimly in that tomb-like place.

It was the footsteps of one person only.

The tramp was measured and regular, as that of a person well acquainted with the place.

Nearer and nearer it came. Evidently in the direction of the door.

Jack retreated down the steps.

Then, as his eyes were on a level with the flooring of the passage beyond, he could see what appeared to him a bright line of light underneath the doorway.

Through the monstrous keyhole, too, the light came

in a long pencil, and made a small, bright spot on the stones.

"Some one is coming through the door, I think. Luckily it is only one person, so it may after all turn out a favourable circumstance for me, and yet there may be others within hearing. Never mind, I must risk that. Ah! he comes."

The heavy footsteps, which during the last few seconds had become very audible, paused at the door, and then followed the rattling of the key in the lock.

"I will crouch down here at the bottom of the steps," thought Jack, and he suited the action to the word. "He won't be looking down at his feet, and he will fall over me as sure as fate; and once down I shall have him at my mercy."

This was a good idea of Jack's, and one that had every chance of success.

Hardly, however, had he disposed himself in the position which he thought would be most effective, than the fastenings having been undone, the door was thrown wide open on its hinges.

Jack was so placed that he could without moving see who it was that thus approached.

By his dress he was evidently a turnkey.

In his right hand he held the bunch of keys which he had just used to open the door.

In the other was a lantern, which to Jack seemed to emit an unusually brilliant light.

But that was only a little optical delusion caused by his having been so long in darkness.

He was almost tempted to rise, for he naturally fell into the mistake that the turnkey would be sure to see him—that, indeed, he could not fail to do so.

Luckily, however, he remained where he was.

In the most careless manner imaginable, the man came through the doorway.

Surely fortune befriended Jack.

The man turned, and closed the door behind him.

The fear of an alarm being given was now at an end.

Not paying any attention to where he was going, for the man had so often traversed the passage he could have done it blindfold, he came down the steps.

That he should meet with anything at the bottom in the shape of an obstruction never once occurred to him.

The consequence was just what Jack had expected.

He did not trust, though, to the man falling over him, but just as he put his right foot on the bottom stair he caught hold of his leg near the ankle, and by a vigorous snatch brought him at once to the ground.

The man uttered a yell of fright, and then his head reached the hard flagstones with a terrible crash.

Then all was still.

The lantern had rolled from his grasp, but was not extinguished.

Jack rose instantly and took possession of it.

Then, observing that the man lay without speech or motion, he ventured to approach and examine him.

He was either insensible or dead, which of the two it was he could not determine, nor did he take much trouble to do so.

He was powerless to do any mischief, and that was all he cared for.

"Its a settler, I think," he said, as he saw the blood oozing slowly from a cut in the turnkey's temple. "I hope not," he said; "but I must either have done what I did, or else suffered myself to be again made prisoner."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

JACK SHEPPARD'S ESCAPE IS DISCOVERED, AND THE ALARM-BELL TOLLED.—THE GOVERNOR'S APARTMENTS AND THE WINDING STAIRCASE.

THIS was so self evident a proposition that it did not admit of a moment's dispute, and so Jack dismissed the affair altogether from his mind, looking upon it as a necessary evil.

The circumstance of the jailer coming to pay a visit to the cells, looked at first sight rather an unfavourable one, but it turned out to be quite the reverse.

At any rate, it was an event that had not at all entered into Jack's calculations, but he seized upon it with avidity, and resolved to turn it to the utmost advantage.

His first step was to take possession of the huge bunch of keys which the man carried in his hand.

Upon examining his girdle he found two other bunches, similar in all respects, and these he took as well.

Thus provided, many of the doors in the old prison, if not all, were at his mercy. The lantern, too, would enable him to see his route.

"He is bigger than I am," remarked Jack, pursuing a new chain of thought. "Suppose I was to take off his clothes and put them on over my own? Why, I should be disguised then effectually, if I took his cap as well, and I might pass muster at a distance for being him. That is a capital thought. I will do it. Fortune is, indeed, my friend to-night. I only hope, after favouring me so far, that she will not be fickle enough to turn the tables."

Jack rapidly divested the turnkey of his apparel as he gave utterance to these reflections, and as fast as he did so put them on himself.

The operation was one that consumed but little time, but when it was over the transformation was complete.

"That will do, I rather think," he said, as he buttoned the large coat over him. "No one now would take me for Jack Sheppard."

He was right enough there, for what with the garments being too large for him, and the odd shape of the fur cap, which he pulled as far down as he could over his eyes, he looked grotesque in the extreme.

He took one more glance at the form of the prostrate turnkey, and then seeing him quite still, he turned round and mounted the steps.

A great many keys, all pretty much the same size, were upon the bunch he held in his hand, and he was a long time before he found the right one.

In his attempts he took care to make as little noise as possible, for fear that some one might hear the many trials made, and suspect that something was wrong.

At last he found the right key, and turning back the bolt, he opened the door boldly, and stepped into the passage beyond.

Then he closed the door carefully after him, and locked it again.

A hasty glance which he cast around, showed him that he was quite alone.

Impressed now with the importance of being as rapid in his movements as possible, and that he had not a moment he could afford to lose, Jack strode forward and examined the place he was in.

It was a kind of chamber in which he stood, from which opened three other doors besides the one through which he had come, and all of the same make and fashion.

He hesitated, for he knew not which to choose.

Chance alone could guide him, so he stepped towards the one nearest to him.

Before he ventured to try any of the keys, he listened as he had done before, to assure himself that there was no one on the other side.

But, even while he was thus engaged, he was startled by hearing some one thrust a key into the lock of the door at his left hand—not the one at which he had been listening.

Discovery seemed all but certain.

He had but one faint chance, and that was that he might be able to find the key that fitted the lock the first he tried, and then he would be able to pass through, and so avoid coming into contact with the person who, in another second, would have the door open.

Jack seized a key at random, and thrust it into the lock.

Could it be possible?

It proved the right key.

The lock yielded.

Jack pushed the door open in a moment, and passed through, but not before the other person, whoever he might prove to be, at the other door had entered the chamber or vestibule.

"Hullo!" he cried, in gruff tones, as he caught sight of Jack's retreating form. "Who's that?"

Jack shut the door, and locked it instantly.

Then listened.

The turnkey, whose duty it was to accompany the one who lay in the inner passage in a round through the cells, but who, for some reason or other, was late, could not afford the time to look who it was he had seen, but went on.

In fact, he only called out upon the surprise of the moment, upon finding anyone there at all, and chiefly because the door through which Jack had passed, was one never used by the prison officials, as it led direct to the private portion of Newgate, which was used as a residence for the governor of the prison.

But this, of course, Jack knew nothing about.

Still he listened at the keyhole.

He heard the new comer open a door, and pass through it.

"If now," Jack thought to himself, "he has opened the door leading to my cell, he will very quickly make a discovery. I will wait here a moment, and then see; for if he finds the jailor stripped and insensible, he won't be long in making an alarm."

Jack was right enough there, for a loud shout came to his ears.

He drew a long breath.

"There's no time to lose now," he said, "and no mistake. I may not, after all, get free, but I will make a desperate effort. Where, I wonder, does this passage lead to?"

"Help! murder!—murder! help! An escape! Break jail! Help!—help! Oh! murder! Fire!"

"Bang! bang! bang! came some heavy blows on the very door on the inside of which Jack's was.

The mental agitation of the turnkey must have been very great, or he would at once have unlocked the door, for he carried keys with him.

But his object just then was to raise an alarm.

"Confound him," said Jack, "I wish I could stop his voice!"

But that was a thing just then not to be thought of, so he ran along the passage as fast as his legs would carry him, until his further progress was stopped by another door.

This one was covered over with green baize, and studded round the panels with brass-headed nails.

Then Jack guessed in a moment that beyond it were the governor's apartments.

Now this passage was one contrived for the special use of the governor and sheriffs, or other high civil functionaries who were desirous of reaching the cells.

Jack's situation was a ticklish one.

The lantern he carried showed him that the door had no fastening of any kind, but swung either way on spring hinges.

There was, however, a brass handle, which was used to pull it open, and thus, having deposited the lantern on the ground, Jack caught hold of it, and just pulled the door a little way open, so that he was able to see what kind of a place there was beyond.

It must be borne in mind that though it has taken us some little time to describe all this, it actually occurred in the space of a few seconds.

The man still continued hammering and shouting.

On the other side of the green baize door all was in darkness, so Jack picked up the lantern, and slipped through it, and observing a strong brass bolt on the inner side he shot into the socket.

He was well enough pleased to find that the sounds were very much fainter. He could just distinguish them, and that was all.

On looking round about him, he found he had quite a choice of routes.

Straight before him, and within reach of his arm, was an ordinary looking chamber door.

There was another on his left hand.

On his right was a flight of narrow winding stairs, but whether it led into the prison or into the sleeping apartments of the governor he could not tell.

He saw this, but felt there was no time to hesitate about routes, for he heard at that moment a sudden rush of footsteps, and an attempt made to open the baize door.

Preparing himself for the worst, he turned the handle of the door facing him and opened it.

As he did so a sudden blaze of light reached his eyes, and some one uttered an exclamation.

Jack just saw that it was a comfortably-furnished room, and that it was tenanted, but that was all.

"The devil!" he said, and shut the door with great expedition.

Crash went the green baize door, and he saw the bolt start from its position.

Then arose the terrific din of a clanging bell.

It was the alarm bell.

The intelligence that a prisoner had escaped would be made known to every one within the building, and all would be on the alert in consequence.

Another rush against the green baize door, and it would give way.

The springing up of so many difficulties all at the same moment, for a second or two had the effect of depriving Jack of the power of motion, but quickly recovering himself, he sprang up the narrow stairs just as he heard the men effect the demolition of the door.

The door of the room, too, into which Jack had looked was also opened.

Owing to the shape of the staircase half-a-dozen steps up it took Jack round a corner, and quite out of sight of any one in the passage.

He had slipped the lantern under his capacious coat, so that no beams from that might betray his presence.

Upon reaching this turn in the staircase he paused, and, stooping down, cautiously peeped over the balusters.

His gaze rested upon a scene of great confusion.

On the threshold of the chamber door, which was now thrown wide open, his burly figure boldly delineated by the bright light behind him, was the governor of Newgate.

Before him, and all speaking at once, were some half-dozen turnkeys.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jack Sheppard, silently. "Ha! ha! There is going to be a bit of sport, and I will stop and see it out."

CHAPTER LXXV.

EDGORTH BESS AWAKES TO THE FULL CONSCIOUSNESS OF HER SITUATION, AND RECEIVES A STARTLING COMMUNICATION IN HER CELL.

If Jonathan Wild possessed a heart—and we think the question a very doubtful one indeed—but if, as we say, he did possess a heart, it must assuredly have been filled with exultation when, after having given his instructions to the governor in the manner we have recorded, he descended the steps which led from the door of the prison into the Old Bailey, and directed his steps towards his house—we were going to say home, but we felt it would be profaning so sacred a word to apply it to the thief-taker's residence.

The street was quite deserted at that early hour, but if any one had met him, the faint light that was in the sky would have shown that his scarred and hideous features were distorted with a grin of intense satisfaction.

All was well.

Success had crowned his every effort, and as he took a rapid mental survey of his position, he saw himself completely master of the field.

The grin changed to an odd chuckling sound, deep down in his throat. The more he thought the more good tempered he grew, and in his extreme delight he quite forgot the pain he had endured, and was still enduring from his wounds.

Blueskin, once his faithful servitor and second self, the man he had treated with thrice as much consideration as any one, afterwards to turn his foe, was now dead. The terrific blow he had given him upon the head with his heavy hanger at the termination of the conflict in the old abbey ruins, was, he was well assured, a fatal one. No mortal man could possibly survive the effects of such a stroke.

So far, then, all was well. He felt that while his lieutenant lived, his position would be most precarious and full of danger. During their long companionship he had confided many secrets of great importance to him.

But now he was dead.

Yet it is certain that Jonathan would have been better pleased if he had left life in some less agreeable manner, but he was forced to rest content and console himself with the reflection that from him, at least, he had nothing more to fear.

Had it not been for the fear he would disclose his secrets, Jonathan would have liked to have had him regularly brought to trial, condemned, and handed over to the mercies of the hangman; but if Blueskin had escaped this death, there was no reason why Jack Sheppard should. He was safe a prisoner, and he had sworn an oath that he would bring him to the gallows.

So much for Jonathan's revenge.

It was in a fair way of being glutted.

Then the young girl, Edgworth Bess. She, too, was in his hands. He could do with her as he could wish. That matter he deferred for future consideration.

Lord Donnull. How should he act towards him? Treacherously, of course! It was not in the villain's nature to do otherwise. He would so manage events that he alone should reap the benefit. Steggs, too: a man with all the inclination to be as great a villain as himself? His fate he had already resolved upon. Two in the same trade he knew would never agree. His interest with his lordship would counteract his. He would interfere with the execution of his designs. Therefore he must be put aside.

But much as the reader may detest Jonathan Wild, we can scarcely expect him to feel any deep emotions of sympathy for Steggs. His villainy was of the worst order. He had no excuse. Overcome in his dying moments by remorse, the man Williams, the poor tool of Abel Donnull, who had been charged with the murder of the heiress, had called Steggs to his side, and with his expiring breath, discovered the whole matter to him, told him that his heart had failed him—that the young heiress still lived—and though steeped in poverty, existing in an atmosphere of crime and vice, that she yet was pure and virtuous, and entreated him, for his soul's sake, to make known his confession, and strive his utmost to restore the poor girl to those rights of which she had been so cruelly and unjustly deprived.

Steggs promised, and Williams, the man of guilt, resigned himself to die, with a lightened soul.

But how did Steggs keep the promise he had so solemnly made at so awful a moment?

The reader has seen.

So, for these reasons, it cannot be expected that much if any pity can be felt for him.

With his hands clasped behind his back, his head bent down, and his chin resting heavily upon his breast, Jonathan, full of deep thought, made his way to his own domicile.

In accordance with his custom, he put his hand into the breast of his waistcoat for the master-key, and then he recollected with an oath that Jack had stolen it from him, and he vowed fresh vengeance on his head.

"He shall die!" he said. "Curse him—he shall swing as his father did before him! And yet," he added, as he banged furiously at his door, and strode into the hall, "and yet he is a young, brave spirit, and would be invaluable to me. My revenge will keep, and be all the better for it. I will try to bend him to my purpose, will drag him still deeper down into the abyss of crime, and when he feels that his soul is lost—lost irredeemably—and he is no further use to me, he shall die! Then, and not till then, shall he grace the triple tree at Tyburn."

The duty of keeping the front door of Wild's house was, as we have before had occasion to remark, taken in turn by his men.

This time Flood was "on the lock."

He opened the door, and closed it without a word, and Jonathan, still muttering his diabolical intentions towards Jack, kicked open the door of his office.

The place was in perfect darkness, but he was sufficiently well acquainted with the position of the different objects in it to dispense with a light, so he walked straight up to the fireplace, and took off the chimney-piece his bull's-eye lantern.

He ignited it in silence.

He had an errand to perform which made him full of thought.

The reader can guess to what portion of his house he was going, to require a light.

The cells.

A part of it that was always in darkness.

Having the lantern fairly alight, he emerged into the hall again.

The man at the grating, seeing him approach, opened it, to allow him to pass through.

It will be remembered that the cell in which he had placed Bess was the one in about the centre of the rest.

This was the one he unfasted.

His hand shook a little.

"How is the girl, I wonder," he muttered; "Is she still in a faint? I should think not. She is young, and Nature ought to bring her to without assistance."

Thus speaking, he entered the cell.

The poor persecuted girl was lying upon the straw just as he had left her, but the noise he made in entering, and the light of the lantern which he carried aroused her, and she sat up.

Jonathan Wild looked at her in silence. He knew that at first her mind must be in a state of great confusion, and he waited until such time as she should be able to recall her thoughts and realize her present position.

Her beautiful countenance assumed an expression of alarm as she saw the kind of place in which she was.

Then her eyes fell upon the thief-taker.

She recognised him instantly, and with a sudden rush the memory of all that had occurred came back to her, and she uttered a piercing shriek, which echoed and re-echoed in the vaulted corridor without.

So distressing were all the circumstances, that for a second time she almost relapsed into a state of unconsciousness; but the harsh grating tones of Jonathan's voice aroused her, and, making a great effort, she sat up and looked him as calmly as she could in the face.

For the life of him Wild could not bear that gaze, and he was forced to abase his eyes.

"Villain!" she exclaimed, "you shall repent of this. Blueskin and Jack will save me."

"Ha! ha!"

There was something very horrible and cold-blooded about this reply, and Bess shuddered.

"Ha! ha!" said Wild again. "Ha! ha! They will save you, will they? I doubt it."

"But I do not," she replied, "and I have faith in heaven."

"Good again, good again. That, I fancy, will be all you will have to trust to. Blueskin—the traitor Blueskin—ha! ha! is dead. I slew him with my own hand, and so you will get small help from him."

"I will not believe it," cried Bess, passionately. "I have too much faith in the mercy of Providence to believe that it would deprive me of a defender, and leave me to the mercy of a villain like yourself."

"Then, as for your fancy man, Jack Sheppard," continued Wild, unheeding her words, "he is safely lodged in Newgate, and when he leaves it it will be in a cart, and he will take a little journey out of town. Ha! ha!"

Wild was tickled with his villainous wit.

"What do you mean?" asked Bess, who, beyond the idea that Jack was in some danger, did not comprehend him. "What do you mean?"

"What I say. He is a prisoner on a charge of burglary, which I shall bring against him. He will go through the form of a trial, be condemned, and swing at Tyburn."

"No—no!" she cried piteously, as she threw herself on her knees at Jonathan's feet. "No—no! You will not, cannot do such an awful deed."

"Ha! ha!"

"Tell me that you are only threatening me for some ulterior purpose—that you do not really mean what you say. Speak to me—speak to me!"

"Are you willing to listen to reason?"

"Yes—yes! Oh! God; yes! Speak—speak!"

"Be calm, then. Jack has no doubt made you acquainted with the secret of your life."

"He has. He told me, too, that you had joined my enemies, and were against me—that you had tried to bend him to your will. But you failed—you failed."

"Knowing this, then, you must be aware that it is merely by the orders of another that I act."

"My cruel uncle?"

"Exactly so."

"And what reward?" cried Bess, a fresh hope springing up in her mind; "and what reward does he offer you for doing this? Tell me its amount, and I will double—ay, treble it—if you will put me in possession of my own."

Jonathan smiled grimly.

"You cannot."

"Cannot what?"

"Double the reward."

"Why not? Surely I have enough for that."

"No," said Wild. "My reward will be the sole and undisputed possession of all your wealth and estates."

"Impossible!" cried the young girl, with a startled look. "My uncle could not be so foolish."

"You are green," said Wild. "When you are older

you will know better. Look at my position," he cried, in an exultant tone of voice. "Blueskin is dead. Jack a prisoner. You a prisoner too, and your uncle so deeply and wholly in my power that he exists but at my pleasure, and I can compel him to act just as I choose."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

A MYSTERIOUS AND SORROW-STRICKEN OLD MAN SEEKS AN INTERVIEW WITH THE THIEF-TAKER.

As Jonathan spoke these words he drew himself up to his full height, and looked defiantly around him.

Edgworth Bess gazed upon him with the utmost surprise and terror.

"You know now," said Wild, after a brief silence. "That is what I meant to tell you. I shall leave you now, in order that you may perpend what you have heard. I shall return in a few hours, and then—ha! ha!—then, my dear, I have a little proposal to make to you."

A hideous leer accompanied these words.

What did he mean?

Bess was terrified, though at what she knew not.

"A little proposal which you will do well to accede to, I can assure you, for if you comply with my wishes, I will do what you wish in return. While I am gone think over all I have said, and make what you can of it."

Jonathan left the cell, and, closing the door behind him, fastened it carefully.

Edgworth Bess listened to the sound of his retreating footsteps along the passage.

Then, groping her way back to the straw, she flung herself upon it, and clasping her hands over her eyes, strove to think.

Jonathan's words and mysterious behaviour filled her with undefined dread.

That he had some deep and hidden motive in paying her the visit he did, she knew enough of him to be certain.

But she found all attempts to speculate upon it fruitless.

Then the current of her thoughts changed, and with a burst of sorrow she thought of the sad fate of her friend and protector, Blueskin, and the reflection that it was to her that he owed his death, added fresh poignancy to her grief.

Jack Sheppard, too, who despite his criminality, she loved with all the fond devotion of a true woman's heart. He, too, was in a scarcely better position, for had not Jonathan told her he was doomed to die—to die the most shameful and ignominious of all deaths.

There she was alone and undefended, without a friend to aid her at the time when a strong arm and a willing heart were most needed to protect her.

Truly was her situation a wretched one indeed, and can it be wondered at that she gave herself up entirely to despair.

Let her turn her mental vision in whatever direction she would, she could see not the faintest glimmering of hope.

The sobs and tears, as bit by bit the forlornness of her condition forced itself upon her, were really heartbreaking.

There was but one source from which she could draw consolation.

She knew the indomitable energy of Jack's disposition, and from that knowledge argued that he would make a powerful effort to escape and rescue her from the grasp of her persecutors.

And so, in a state of mind at times bordering upon madness, but at all times wretched, the day passed away.

Jonathan Wild, when he left her cell, went up into the hall, and, after a moment's reflection, out of the front door.

"Flood!"

"Yes, Mr. Wild. What did you please to want, sir? I am here at your service, Mr. Wild."

"Ya—ah! Silence. I shall be back in an hour."

"Very good, sir. Oh! yes, sir."

Jonathan descended the steps, and Flood, as he closed the door, muttered—

"The villain. I did hope he was done for, curse him! I wish I had hit him a little harder than I did."

It will be recollected that Flood was the name of the man who had knocked Wild about so when they conveyed him to London.

On this occasion Jonathan's business was of a very ordinary and every day kind indeed. The fact was he wanted something to eat.

His household was carried on under rather strange principles, and whenever he took a meal there was always one eating-house where he went to eat it.

This eating-house was in Giltspur-street, facing the east end of St. Sepulchre's-church, and was kept by a creature of his.

Towards it he now made his way. Many hours had elapsed since he had taken any food, and now he felt himself sick and faint for want of sustenance.

The hour was an early one, and few people were in the streets; still fewer shops were open.

But Wild knew his wishes were always attended to with the utmost alacrity, let him appear at what hour he would.

He found a man taking down the shutters. He seemed only partially awake, and he stopped in his work every now and then and yawned in such a frightful manner that his head seemed in imminent danger of falling off.

But it is hardly worth while to be so minute as to follow Wild into the eating-house, when we have so many stirring and important events pressing upon us for speedy recital. Let it suffice to say, that having eaten enough to satisfy a small regiment, he, in something less than an hour, reached the door of his own house again.

As he crossed the street, he turned his head and looked up at the church clock.

It was a few minutes past seven.

"I will go and have three hours' rest," he said. "I feel badly in want of it. Then I shall be able to attend to business in my office properly. I have sadly neglected it of late, but thank the fates things will go on a little smoother now."

What a mistake.

But we will not overrun our story, but merely describe events in the order in which they happened.

In pursuance, then, of his expressed intention, Jonathan made his way to the bed-room on the second floor, and flinging himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, fell into a profound slumber.

Then he moved and got his neck bent in some odd way, and began to snore in a frightful manner.

The door was then cautiously pushed open, and a head thrust in.

Satisfied apparently that he might safely venture to enter, Mr. Ebenezer Snoxall, the apothecary, did so.

"Ha!" he said, in a whisper, as he reached the side of the bed. "He's asleep now, and no mistake. I had better take the opportunity of dressing his wound, or there will be no bearing him when he awakes. What a horrible noise. I'll shift his head a little, and see if that will stop it. Oh! ah! yes. That's it. Capital!"

Jonathan's nasal concert ceased.

The apothecary now, with trembling hands and gentle touch, set about the very unpleasant task he had to perform.

But Jonathan's sleep was too profound for it to arouse him, though he several times shouted and moved about uneasily, to the great terror of the man of physic.

"That's over," he said, at last; "and now, Jonathan Wild, you can sleep as long as you like."

He glided from the room like a phantom.

When Wild threw himself upon the bed and fell asleep, it was with the mental resolution to awake in three hours' time.

It was just striking ten when he opened his eyes.

He felt wonderfully better than he had for some time.

His hearty meal, sound sleep, and careful dressing of his wound had all conspired to produce this effect.

He rolled off the bed, adjusted his clothes a little, and then slunk down stairs with the stealthy tread of a cat.

He was in hopes, by coming unexpectedly, to catch some one "on the hop," as he called it, by which expression he meant doing or saying something which he would not be desired to witness.

But his rascally crew were too wide awake to be up to anything just then. They every moment expected to see him make his appearance.

Scarcely had Jonathan seated himself at the desk than Wilkinson tapped at the door, and just showed the end of his nose.

"A visitor, Mr. Wild."

"Come in."

"Yes, Mr. Wild,"

Wilkinson did not know whether to feel pleased or not, but he obeyed.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know, sir. He's an old man, and seems to be in very great distress about something. He has been here a great many times, and says his business with you is of the utmost importance."

"Is he well dressed?"

"Not very, Mr. Wild."

"Never mind, I will see him."

Wilkinson, as the Americans, in their peculiar vernacular, would have said, "made tracks" for the door.

"Stop!" cried Wild.

He had his hand on the knob of the door, but he stopped at once.

"Wilkinson, come here."

"Yes, Mr. Wild," he replied.

He dreaded this pacific demeanour on the part of his employer boded him no good.

His conscience, too, accused him, for he had been mixing himself up in some little affairs which, if they came to Jonathan's knowledge, would assuredly put his head in the halter.

Trembling, then, in every limb, and white as ashes, he approached the railings in front of the desk at which Wild was seated.

"Wilkinson!"

"I am here, Mr. Wild."

"You don't seem very well."

"Me, sir? Why—a—yes—a—that is to say"—

"And confused! But don't be afraid, Wilkinson. I believe you are faithful to me, and I don't want to be unjust."

"No!" groaned Wilkinson, and that was all he could say.

"You gave me some very important news about the ruined abbey, and, what is more, the information turned out to be perfectly correct."

"Yes, Mr. Wild," said Wilkinson, brightening up a little, and losing much of his dread.

"I succeeded in that important business, which I shouldn't have done so easily if it had not been for you."

"Oh! Mr. Wild," exclaimed Wilkinson, with a hypocritical whine.

"So, to reward you, and encourage you to tell me anything else you may think I should like to know, there's a twenty pound note, Wilkinson. Put it in your pocket, and say no more about it."

"Oh! Mr. Wild," gasped Wilkinson, as he clutched the crisp bit of paper. "Oh! Mr. Wild, you are too good!"

"The intelligence was important. Let it be an encouragement to you. Hold your row!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where's this old man you spoke of?"

"Waiting in No. 2, sir."

"Very well. Bring him in here at once, and don't say another word."

Wilkinson closed the door.

"Oh! I'm blowed!" he muttered, and he looked at the note which had been given him, and found it genuine. "Johnny's grateful. The blessed world will come to an end after this, and no mistake. What a fool I was to be a frightening myself like that about nothink at all."

He opened the door of the little waiting-room which was called No. 2.

Seated in an arm-chair by the fire-place, his face buried in his hands, and wearing every appearance of the utmost sorrow, was an old man.

What could he want with Jonathan Wild?

CHAPTER LXXVII.

RETURNS TO THE LONELY CHAMBER AT THE TOP OF THE NORTH TURRET OF THE RUINED ABBEY.

NOTHING would please us better than to at once answer the question, but our attention cannot any longer be diverted from some other events replete with interest.

The reader must exercise that most commendable of all virtues, patience.

But we promise to keep him no longer than we can help.



[BLUESKIN IMPLORES THE POACHERS TO SPARE HIS LIFE.]

Leaving, then, the sorrowful and mysterious old man upon the point of being introduced to Jonathan.

Leaving Edgeworth Bess in the silence, solitude, and darkness of her cell beneath Wild's house.

Leaving Jack Sheppard in his very perilous position upon the winding staircase in that part of Newgate devoted to the governor's use.

We turn to one whose condition was, if possible, worse than all, and of whom we have for so long lost sight.

We allude to Blueskin.

It will be recollected that on the occasion of Wild's sudden irruption into the turret chamber, a conflict had taken place between them.

The result of that conflict is already known to the reader.

With one terrific heavy blow of his hanger, Jonathan had beat down his guard, and inflicted a ghastly wound upon his (Blueskin's) head.

He fell as though struck by lightning, and was left extended on his back for a dead man.

The fire died out.

Gradually as she sank towards the west, the moon's rays ceased to shine through the grated windows.

The chamber was in darkness.

Presently the sun rose, and gilded with its first rays the crumbling walls of the old ruin, investing them for a time with a more than magic beauty.

Then, as the god of day climbed still higher and higher in the sky, the golden tint departed, and an ordinary white one took its place.

At last, even as the moon had done on the precedent night, the sun shone through the turret windows.

His warm, revivifying beams revealed a frightful spectacle.

His hair matted with blood, which had coagulated round his head, and so stopped the hemorrhage; bereft of all motion, his eyes wide open and vitreous, the pallor of death upon his face, lay Blueskin!

But he was not dead, though life clung to him by but a feeble tenure.

Still, he gave no signs of life, and no one who gazed upon him could have come to any other conclusion than that he was a corpse.

Higher and higher rose the sun, brighter and warmer became his rays, but yet that mutilated form stirred not.

Oh! could but some kind Samaritan have been made aware of the desperate condition of a fellow-creature, he would have hastened to his assistance, bound up his wounds, and brought him back to life.

But in that lonely foot-deserted place, what hope was there that any one would come to tend his hurts?

Alas! none.

His recovery must then be left in the hands of nature.

The cool autumn day fades away.

Hope fades with it.

The deathlike trance has now continued upwards of eighteen hours.

Had it not so chanced that the blood congealed over the wound, and so stopped its further flow, he must inevitably have bled to death.

As it was, though, he had lost no inconsiderable quantity of the vital fluid, yet it was not enough to endanger life.

Obscure and obscure grew the different objects once again, until it was impossible to distinguish the form which lay so stark and still.

No signs of returning animation.

A north-east wind sighed with a melancholy cadence through the abbey ruins.

The leaves of the ivy and other parasitic plants that clung to the time-worn stonework for support rustled ceaselessly.

The gigantic owls, who had for so long found there a safe and unmolested home, uttered at intervals their strange unearthly cry, too-who, too-who.

Dense masses of clouds overspread the heavens, and shut out the radiance of the queen of night.

But the wind, as it increased in power, sent them scudding away until they piled themselves up in a huge bank on the opposite side of the horizon.

Then the silvery moon and pale, twinkling stars, were brought to view.

The moon was exactly at the full.

Through the window in the turret streamed with full force her light, revealing its interior with a seemingly greater clearness than the sun himself.

In broad and picturesque masses of light and shade it fell.

The body of Blueskin, looking like some statue, so still and corpse-like looking was it, could be once more seen.

In the long interval of time no change had taken place.

His eyes were fixed, and staring blindly upwards.

The arms outstretched.

The limbs rigid.

Is he to die?

And as the pale pure beams of the full moon rest upon him there starts up, unbidden to the imagination, the horrible superstition of the vampire.

That phantom, the bare idea of which coids the warm life-blood about the heart, and causes a clammy moisture in the brain.

That phantom which perpetuates a loathly life by sucking the life-blood from the veins of the young.

That phantom, immortal, though liable to death like any human being, yet who, upon being exposed to the moonlight, takes presently a new lease of existence.

That phantom to whom the moon is a god, from whom, from time to time, he draws fresh life and vigour to continue his unholy work.

Yes, such is the superstition which a contemplation of that prostrate form cannot fail to bring before the mind.

The silence and solitude of the place.

The immobility of that spectral-looking shape.

The bright moonbeams shining with unnatural lustre upon him.

All these circumstances would lead to such a thought, without any great stretch of the imagination.

And that idea having once taken firm possession of anyone, how they would have felt the heart still its pulsations—how they would have felt the healthy action of their lungs impeded, and the breath sent forth in sudden and fitful gasps—how they would have felt the blood creep through its channels like water, when they saw the deathly

object make a slight, almost imperceptible movement.

Could it be possible that the lunar light contained some resuscitative power?

It would seem so.

The slight movement was repeated.

It was a strong convulsive shudder of the whole body.

Then the arms moved, and at last the seemingly dead man raised himself upon one arm, and looked about him.

All round do his eyes wander, and then, as if under some powerful fascination, they rest upon the moon's disk.

Very ghastly indeed was the aspect of the countenance.

A groan came from the white lips.

Then the factitious strength which had enabled him to rise departed, and he sank down again upon his back.

But this time he was in possession of his faculties.

His head was racked with an intolerable pain, which seemed now as if a fiery arrow had pierced his brain, and then as though his skull was falling asunder.

The effort which he made to recollect who he was, and what had happened last, aggravated these symptoms frightfully.

Still he did not give up.

A natural impulse made him carry his hand to his head.

It was sticky, cold, and wet.

"I have been wounded," he said. "I have been wounded. How did it happen, I wonder? Am I still alive, or is this death?"

He again struggled to a half-sitting posture.

This time he was much stronger.

He had about his brain a dim consciousness of what had occurred, but that was all. Nothing at all resembling distinct recollection.

Then all at once he became seized with the idea that he was in some imminent danger where he was, and that it was imperative he should escape at once.

That was delirium.

In obedience to this instinct, and finding his strength wonderfully increased, he made all speed he could towards the door.

On his hands and feet he crawled, leaving behind him a track of blood as he went.

Down the narrow, dark, and steep stone staircase, missing a dozen times by a hair's breath a fall that would then and there have finished his career.

Through the little door and out into the mazy intricacies of the abbey ruins he went.

Paying no heed to his course—climbing with incredible labour over obstacles he could easily have crawled round—possessed but with the idea that by keeping on he was escaping some great peril, he did not stay for breath, but hastened on.

The exertion caused the wound in his head to break out afresh, and the hot blood trickled down on to his neck and face.

Not heeding this in the least—indeed, it is questionable whether he was aware of it—he emerged from the ruins, and plunged into the wood surrounding them.

Still maintaining the same onward course, vainly exhausting his strength, he forced his way through the thickest of the undergrowth.

The gorse bushes wound his hands, the prickly thorn and wildbriar lacerate his flesh, but he cares not, feels not, so that he still goes onward.

His sense of hearing, too, is stretched to the utmost, in expectation of hearing some indications of pursuit.

But in that lonely place all is still.

And now he reaches the margin of one of those open spaces, which are met with in all woods of great extent.

He wipes the blood from his face with his hand, wondering the while what it is, and listens.

His pulse begins to slacken.

He can hear sounds which fill his heart with dread, and convince him his foes are close upon his track.

The trampling of feet.

The murmuring of voices.

Close at hand, too, they seemed.

With the energy of despair he made a desperate effort to force his way further through the bushes.

Then he heard the loud report of a gun, and simultaneously felt a slight shock.

"I am shot!" he gasped, and then he sank down upon the earth, having looked, as he firmly believed, for the last time upon the face of nature.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

BLUESKIN ESCAPES BUT FROM ONE PERIL TO FALL INTO ANOTHER.

AND now, from the shadowy sides of the small open space, upon the borders of which Blueskin had fallen, there emerged several dusky forms.

With slow, stealthy steps, and as though animated by one impulse, they made their way to the centre of the enclosure.

As they reached it, and stood there in a dense, silent throng, the moonbeams revealed their garb and features.

Almost without exception they were attired as farmhouse labourers, only there was an air and manner about them which showed they were not those peaceful people.

The large slouching felt hats which they wore upon their heads concealed a great portion of their features, but what could be seen was forbidding enough.

Each man carried a musket.

They looked anxiously around them, whilst some assumed listening attitudes.

"All is well, I fancy," said one, in hoarse, guttural accents. "I can hear nothing. I think I had him."

"What was it?"

"I know not. Some spy, I should think; but I hope I have put an end to him, though. It was some one sneaking through the underwood, and who would do that but a spy?"

"That's right enough," said another. "But why don't you go and see what it is?"

"Why don't you?"

"Oh! you fired the gun, didn't you? Go and see yourself. Ha! look there. Hark! What is it? Oh! what is it?"

The other men, upon hearing these words from their companion, and seeing him raise his arm, looked immediately in the direction in which he pointed.

They shrunk back and got closer to each other.

Some held their guns butt ends upwards in attitudes of defence.

Then a miserable-looking object, which looked scarcely human, crept out of the shadow of the trees into the patch of moonlight.

It was Blueskin.

When he fell down, as recorded at the end of the last chapter, it was under the firm conviction that he was mortally wounded.

But this he quickly found was not the case.

Our readers suspect what had happened.

The men in the wood were poachers, and hearing some one forcing a way through the brake, they had taken it to be a spy, and fired in the direction of the sound.

The gun was only loaded with small shot, only a few of which struck Blueskin on the leg. The remainder flew harmlessly over him.

Still, in the state in which he then was, the idea that he was killed would be the one most likely to take fast hold of his imagination.

But, as we have already said, he soon found he was unhurt.

And now a result occurred which might have been expected.

The flow of blood from the wound had dispelled the delirium from his brain, and he recollected with the greatest suddenness all that had occurred.

He rose, although his weakness was excessive.

He could hear the sound of voices, and he made his way slowly and painfully towards the place from which they came, with the intention of asking for relief.

Crawling on his hands and knees, and dragging with the greatest difficulty one leg after another, he came.

"Help! help!" he cried. "Mercy! mercy! Do not strike me. I am wounded, I fear, to the death, and cannot raise my hand in my defence. Save me—save me! Mercy—mercy!"

It was only feebly that he could utter these words, although he strained his voice to the utmost.

And all the time he spoke he crawled nearer and nearer to the men.

But as they saw him draw so close they raised their guns threateningly, and with hoarse cries warned him off. They feared it was but a snare—a portion of some deeply-laid plan for their apprehension.

"No—no!" said Blueskin, in a weaker voice, "you

cannot be so inhuman as to refuse me what I ask. Help! help!—oh! help! Help me, or I die!"

"Hold off!" cried the poachers, "hold off! We can do nothing for you. Hold off, or it will be the worse for you!"

Blueskin looked up as these unfeeling words reached his ears.

His gaze met only stern and angry faces, and weapons lifted menacingly above him.

He strove to speak.

He could not.

With his right hand he clutched his throat, as though he could have torn away the impediment to speech.

He made another frantic effort to raise his voice, but a whisper only issued from his lips.

"Gold!" he said, "gold! I am rich! Gold—gold—to those who help me! Mercy! mercy! I—I—help—ah!—he—"

Uttering these words in a hissing whisper he fell like a log of wood to the ground.

The poachers looked into each other's faces in alarm and doubt.

"Poor wretch!" said one at last.

"Let's finish him," cried another, a huge, bull-necked fellow, "we should do him a kindness by putting him out of his misery. What do you say, mates?"

He swung his gun, which he had hold of by the barrel, two or three times round his head, in order that he might bring it down with greater force.

And bring it down he assuredly would—for the remainder of the gang, looking up to him as their leader, made no sign of dissent—had not a stalwart young fellow sprang forward from their midst, and caught the descending weapon in his hands.

"No, no," he cried, "I won't stand by and see a helpless wounded man murdered if I can help it. I'll tell you what it is, Jack Adams: hard times, bad masters, and misfortunes may have driven me to be a poacher, but my heart is not dead yet!"

"Let go of my gun!" said the tall ruffian, who had been called Jack Adams; "what do I care whether your heart is dead or not. Let go of my gun, I say, or I'll make you."

"Never, until you promise to let this man be."

"Ho! ho! hark, mates! How long has this young cock been your captain, I should like to know?"

"I say I won't see this man murdered!"

"He is a spy, I tell you," cried Jack Adams, "and it's a trap to catch us! Death to the spy! Isn't that it, mates?"

"Yes, yes," cried the others, "down with them both—down with them both!"

"Hold!" cried Adams: "now I know your minds, all right. Hold off a bit; the man on the ground can't hurt us for a minute or two, and as this is a little personal affair between George and myself, why we'll settle it."

"Bravo, Adams! That's fair! Give it to him! We'll stand by! A ring—a ring! Make a ring!"

Such were the vociferations which saluted Jack Adams's proposal.

Anything in the shape of a personal contest was something very congenial to their dispositions, and as the intending combatants were the two strongest men in the gang, they looked forward to this one with unusual interest.

As for the young man, George, he exhibited the utmost willingness to settle the matter in the manner proposed.

It was not the first difference he had had with Adams. A ring was quickly formed and seconds appointed.

With great speed the men now proceeded to divest themselves of the upper portion of their apparel, and in a minute or two they stood facing each other in the moonlight, stripped to the waist.

Both were strong, well-formed men, and tolerably matched in all respects save height and length of reach, in both of which Adams had the advantage.

After a little cautious sparring they flew at each other with the utmost fury, and some heavy blows were exchanged.

Then both combatants fell to the ground.

They were quickly raised by their seconds.

Scarcely waiting to draw breath and wipe the blood and dirt from their persons, they again rushed at each other.

This time the encounter was fierce and more protracted, but it ended by both kissing the earth as before.

A rest of a few minutes now became imperative, but when the combatants were again placed face to face, all present felt certain that this, the third round, would decide the battle.

Both appeared to be much injured.

But their blood was up to fighting point, and they went at it like demons.

The poachers looked on with the most intense delight, and so absorbed were they that they quite forgot the cause of the duel.

Backwards and forwards, round and round went the two men.

It soon became evident George was getting the best, and Adams the worst of it.

This fact seemed to press itself upon the observation of the latter, for he fought with positive fury.

George still maintained his calmness, and then, having watched his opportunity, he struck his opponent a tremendous blow on the mouth, and down he fell senseless.

George was the victor.

Two or three stooped over their vanquished captain, but the majority surrounded George, and overwhelmed him with congratulations.

"Where is the poor man who asked for help?" he cried, although he was so much punished that he could hardly stand. "Where is he?"

"Here, George, and as dead as a nut."

"No, no, not dead. Pick him up, some of you; I wouldn't trouble you if I could help it. Pick him up, and carry him carefully to my cottage. 'Tain't far from here, you know."

"All right, George; we'll do it, my lad. You've got a rare pluck, and no mistake."

Blueskin accordingly was raised as gently as their rough hands would permit.

The movement aroused him.

"Save me," he cried. "Gold! heaps of gold to those who save me! A doctor—send for a doctor, or I shall bleed to death!"

"All right, gov'nor. Come along of us. George has licked Jack Adams, so we're going to take you to his cottage. Come on, its all right."

More dead than alive, as people say, Blueskin was taken by a narrow, winding pathway through the trees, to a miserable hut in which George and his wife and family dwelt.

With great care he was laid on the only bed there was in the place.

George, before he entered, swilled himself well under a pump, so that his wife should not see what had taken place the moment he entered.

"A doctor—a doctor!" moaned Blueskin.

"Here's old Ann," said one of the men, as a decrepit old woman approached the bedside. "Here's old Ann! She knows more about hurts nor any doctor in the kingdom. Don't you, Ann?"

"Get away with you. Get away with you all," said old Ann, in a shrill tone of voice. "Leave me alone with him, and then, if it is possible for a human being to save his life, I'll save it! Be off with you all! There must be sport found to-night."

In obedience to these words the poachers withdrew, leaving the old woman and George's wife alone with Blueskin.

Between them they carefully washed and bound up his wounds, to which the old woman applied a dark-coloured ointment, which she assured him would heal the wound in a short space of time.

When this was over she forced some narcotic down his throat, and in less than ten minutes from the time it was administered, Blueskin was in a deep sound sleep which would go far towards recruiting his exhausted energies.

And here again we must leave him for a time, while we direct the reader's attention to other scenes of the deepest interest.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS OLD MAN REVEALS HIMSELF, AND MAKES A STRANGE COMMUNICATION TO JONATHAN WILD.

"Now then, sir, Mr. Wild is waiting to see you," said Wilkinson, in more civil tones than he usually made use of; but the fact is the twenty-pound note Jonathan had given him had had a soothing effect upon his system; "now then, sir, if you want to see Mr. Wild."

It was to the dejected old man who sat by the fireplace in the waiting-room that he spoke.

Upon hearing these words the old man subdued the ward manifestations of his grief, and rose to his feet.

As he thus stood, the most casual observer could not fail to notice that he bore about him the impress of a gentleman.

But his hair and attire were in disorder. His face and hands unwashed.

On the little finger of the left hand sparkled a ring, and his soiled and torn clothes were of the best workmanship and material.

What could so strange a being want with Jonathan Wild?

Not to unbosom his sorrows to him, one would think.

Wild was hardly the sort of man to sympathize with anyone's misfortunes save his own.

Patience, reader. The conversation which took place between the strange pair will explain it.

Wilkinson led the way to the door of the thief-taker's office, and having ushered in the mysterious old man he withdrew.

Jonathan Wild bent a keen glance upon his visitor, and was struck with his peculiar appearance.

On his part, the old man, with a diffidence that seemed native to him, advanced to the railings of the desk, and said tremulously—

"Mr. Jonathan Wild?"

"That's my name, sir; what's yours? Excuse my way, but I have a great deal of business to do, and no time to spare."

"Just so, sir; my name is Joseph Stansbury. The business I come upon is of a very important and serious character."

"Then if it is in my power you shall be served. Will you be good enough to explain, sir?"

"I will in as few words as I can."

"Good."

"But I must first ask your advice. I am by no means certain that you either can or will aid me. What is your fee?"

"I make no charges," said Wild; "I am quite ready to hear all you have got to say."

The strange old man, and who we may as well in future call by his name, Joseph Stansbury, looked at Jonathan in some surprise upon hearing this announcement. He did not know his peculiar mode of carrying on business.

"Of course, Mr. Wild," he said, "I have heard a great deal about you"—

Jonathan bowed.

"And your extraordinary skill in tracing stolen goods."

"Well, sir, what of that?"

"It occurred to me, Mr. Wild," replied Mr. Stansbury, with difficulty repressing a sob, "that as you were so successful in finding property, you might be equally so in finding persons."

"You must explain more, sir. I have particular sources of information."

"So I have heard, Mr. Wild. Well, to be brief, I want you to find my son."

"Your son!"

"Yes; my only son—my darling! My dear boy! My only child, William!"

"Ya—ah!"

"Sir!"

"Nothing! But how old is this son? How did he disappear? As yet, you will remember, you have given me no particulars."

"I have not; but I am so bowed down with grief that I hardly know what I am saying, or what I am about. He is twenty-three years of age."

"A young man, then?"

"Even so."

"Ha!" said Wild, with a feeling of greater interest.

"I fancied all the while it was a little child which you had lost."

"No—no. My trouble is greater than that. He is a young man, just as we may say upon the threshold of life."

"How did he disappear?"

"He came up to London. I sent him on business of my own. Would that I had come myself. Alas! alas! could I but have known, and then this would never have happened."

"He came up to London, you say?"

"He did; and from that hour to this we have never heard aught of him."

"You must tell me all the particulars, and then I think, from my knowledge of the city, I may get upon his track. From what town did he come, and how long ago?"

"He came from Abingdon, Mr. Wild. That is where I live. Do you know the place?"

"It is a little village not far from Oxford, is it not?"

"It is—it is! At Water-farm, Abingdon!"

"And when did he leave?" said Jonathan, taking up a pen, and dropping it in the ink. "How long is it since?"

"A weary time. Let me see; I have it here in this pocket-book. On the 12th of last July he left the farm."

"Nearly two months ago, then," said Jonathan, making a note. To tell the truth, accustomed as he was to hearing all kinds of strange revelations, there was something in this affair that aroused his curiosity.

"Nearly two months! It seems to me like two years!"

"Indeed. Now, Mr. Stansbury, let me tell you it is a very extraordinary thing for a young man of the age you describe to come up to London and then never be heard of again. Let me hear all, and then I may perhaps be able to arrive at some conclusion respecting it. Now I confess myself quite unable to do so."

"Well, you must know, sir, I had a sudden demand made upon me for the payment of a large sum of money."

"Yes—yes!"

"It was not more than I could pay, you understand, but pretty nearly all I had was then at my bankers, and as it was wanted immediately, and I was very unwell, I sent my son up to London instead."

Wild nodded.

"My poor, darling boy. You must know, Mr. Wild, that it falls to the lot of few fathers to have a son like my William; very few indeed. Have you a son, sir?"

A terrific scowl distorted Jonathan's countenance as this apparently simple question was put to him. He had a son—but no matter—he controlled himself, and simply said, in a constrained tone of voice—

"Go on. What of your son?"

"He was all that a parent could wish. I loved his mother, Mr. Wild, for I have a loving heart; but in gaining a son I lost a wife."

Mr. Stansbury paused from excess of emotion.

To what point did this strange story tend?

It was impossible to imagine.

Jonathan hurriedly bid him to proceed. The simple question he had been asked about his son touched him in a place he thought invulnerable, for Jonathan had a son, of whom the reader of this narrative will yet learn something new and startling.

"Three days, Mr. Wild, before I sent my son on this disastrous journey he married a young girl to whom he had been long betrothed. I am entering into all these particulars in order that you may the better comprehend the whole story."

"It is well to be explicit," replied Jonathan, "but try to be brief at the same time."

"I will. As his journey would be one of business only, and as he would make it in the shortest time possible, he left his bride behind him. It would, he thought, be unkind to fatigue her with such a journey. Alas! she has never seen him more."

Jonathan drew a long breath.

The case was growing more complicated, and the clue he fancied he had found he lost again.

"Have you any evidence he reached London?"

"Yes, the driver of the coach, by whose side he sat all the way, remembers his alighting at the inn in Piccadilly, where they stop."

"Indeed; that is enough. And now about the money. Did he get that?"

"He did sir. Of course, when we found he did not come back we grew alarmed, and I started off forthwith. My first visit was to the banking-house. A clerk there remembered his calling and receiving the money."

"What was the amount?"

"Six thousand four hundred pounds."

"When did he receive it?"

"On the 14th of July."

"He started on the 12th?"

"He did."

"No time was lost then?"

"None, you see."

"And he left the bank with the money in his possession?"

"Yes, I have every reason to believe he did."

"And then?"

"After that, Mr. Wild, I can find nothing whatever of him. All trace is gone."

"Extraordinary."

"Look at me, Mr. Wild; I came up here six weeks ago. In all that time I have rested neither night and day, but have searched for him unceasingly."

"And without result?"

"Without result; and so in despair—as a last resource, in fact—I came here to you to ask you if you could assist me to find my poor boy."

"It is a pity you did not apply to me earlier. I should have stood a much better chance of success then. As it is the scent is cold. Still, do not despair. I feel, I can assure you, a more than common interest in this case, and if he is in London I will guarantee to find him."

"You fill me with fresh hopes," said the old man, as tears trickled down his cheeks. "Use your best endeavours, Mr. Wild, not only for a father's sake, but for the poor girl who loves him, and who has not ceased to lament his inexplicable disappearance."

"But what bank was it?"

"The Bank of England."

"Good! Now sir, give me as complete a description of your son as lies within your power."

"I thought you would want that," said Mr. Stansbury; "so while I was waiting for you yesterday I wrote it out. I put it in this pocket-book. Here it is."

"Very good," said Wild, "that will suffice. Rely upon my doing my utmost for you. I do not think I shall want anything more. I shall send out my agents to make inquiries at once, and you had better call here every day to know the result."

"And what will that cost, Mr. Wild?"

"Wait until the job is completed," said the crafty thief-taker. "If I restore your son to you, I can rely upon your gratitude to reward me."

"You can—you can indeed. I hope and trust your efforts will prove more successful than mine."

Wild summoned Wilkinson in his usual fashion.

"Show this gentleman out," he said. "He will call again to-morrow."

With a lighter heart than he had had for some time past Mr. Stansbury left Wild's house.

As the door closed behind him, Jonathan rested his chin in the palms of his hands, and gave himself up to deep thought.

"What am I to think of this affair? I am puzzled. Still I am glad it has been put into my hands. It will afford me an opportunity of making a great stir about doing good, and it is only by resorting occasionally to such means that I can hope to succeed in blinding their eyes to these other practices. I will set about it now."

Wilkinson is again summoned.

"Where is Pinching Tom?"

"Here, Mr. Wild."

"Send him in."

Our old friend, of whom we have not heard for so long, entered.

Jonathan called him to his side, and gave him his instructions in a low tone of voice.

What they were will be developed.

"I quite understand, Mr. Wild. It shall be done, though it is a queer thing altogether."

CHAPTER LXXX.

LORD DONMULL'S REMORSE AND REPENTANCE—BUT OF SHORT DURATION.

"Come in!" roared Jonathan, in reply to a faint tap-tap upon the panel of his office-door, about ten minutes after Pinching Tom had taken his departure, "come in."

"Quilt Arnold, Mr. Wild," said Wilkinson.

"Has he his prisoner?"

"Yes sir."

"Tell him to take him to No. 7, and there leave him until further instructions."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Is anyone else waiting for me?"

"The gentleman who went with us last night."

"Send him here, then; but stop a moment. Did he see Quilt bring in the prisoner?"

"No, sir, I took care of that. He is in No. 2, with the door shut."

"Right; I'll come myself."

Jonathan got down off his stool, and stalked into the passage.

The first thing that there met his view was the prisoner Quilt Arnold had brought in.

Who that prisoner was the reader can perhaps guess.

It was Lord Donmull's accomplice, Steggs.

A glance of mutual hate passed between these two men, but as he was gagged Steggs could not speak, and as for Jonathan he disdain to do so.

"Take him to No. 7, Quilt."

"Yes, sir; he has given us a great deal of trouble."

"Ha! ha!"

"He has, indeed."

"I don't doubt it, Quilt, only I laughed 'ha! ha!' because I thought, just as you spoke, how soon his troubles would be over."

"Ho! ho!"

Arnold thought he had better laugh at Wild's pleasantry.

But he soon repented it.

Jonathan had his cudgel in his hand, and he hit him a rather sharp crack with it, as he said—

"Don't laugh when I do, Quilt; recollect that in future. Into No. 7 with him."

Quilt rubbed his head, and dragged the struggling prisoner off, whose doom Jonathan considered quite sealed.

As soon as they had fairly departed, Wild went to the door of the little waiting-room, and opening it a few inches peeped in.

Lord Donmull was looking out into the street as well as the smoke and dirt-begrimed panes would let him.

"Good morning, my lord," said Wild. "Sorry to keep you waiting. Come upstairs."

Abel Donmull followed Jonathan up the stairs to the room in which he had sat during a former interview.

He glanced uneasily around, and sank into a chair.

"You don't look well, my lord," said Wild, as he, too, took a seat, and noticed the ghastly paleness of his lordship's countenance. "What is there amiss now?"

"Nothing more—nothing more."

"Then all is well. Pour out some brandy, my lord; you will be better then."

"The girl?"

"She is safe underneath this house," was the reply.

"Where," he added, in a lower key, "for a consideration she can remain until such time as you may think fit to order her release."

"Wild, Wild," said Lord Donmull, remorsefully, "my life is a miserable burden to me. I am racked by a thousand hopes and fears. If this state of mind continues I shall wear myself into the grave."

"Beyond all doubt you will if you do not rouse yourself from these gloomy fancies and baseless fears. Pluck up your spirit, for now is the time to do so. You have all in your own hands now! You can secure yourself in any way you may think proper."

"Wild?"

"Yes, my lord."

"She is quite safe, you say?"

"Quite."

"How does she seem, Wild?"

"What do you mean, my lord?"

"Do you think, do you think that if I went to her, Wild,

and told her what I had done—do you think she would forgive me, and be content to receive back her own?"

"Are you mad?"

"No, no, not mad, but sick at heart. Show me where to find her, Wild, and I will make the attempt."

"Calm yourself," said Jonathan, with a derisive grin.

"Calm yourself. You must be mad to think of such a thing. Besides, I cannot allow you to make such an offer."

"What?"

"Do not storm. It will have no effect. I simply mean what I say. I cannot allow it."

Lord Donmull looked at Wild with speechless surprise.

"You seem to forget, my lord, the little bargain between us. I cannot afford to waste my time to no purpose, and if you resign your possessions, how are you to fulfil your contract. Cease to think of it. My lord, you are wholly in my power."

"Lord Donmull sat aghast when he saw how deeply he was committed to the villain before him.

He repented of his misdeeds.

Would have made all the reparation in his power.

But, like many others, his repentance came too late.

"To-morrow," continued Wild, after a pause, "you will be calmer, and then you will feel thankful to me for having acted in the way I have. The excitement of the past few days have been too much for you. You must have rest and quiet for a time, and then all will be well. You can have nothing whatever to fear so long as you keep your word to me. The girl's safe custody I will answer for."

"Where is Steggs?"

"He, too, is quite safe. Drink, my lord. Success to yourself—confusion to your foes!"

Jonathan pushed a brimming glass of brandy across the table.

Lord Donmull took it with a quivering hand, and, putting it to his lips, drained the contents at one draught.

The effects of so large a quantity of raw spirit were just what might have been expected.

His remorse vanished, and he became the bold unscrupulous man he had ever been.

Jonathan watched him anxiously.

He was playing a very deep game, was Wild. The stakes were high, for, as will be seen, he aimed at the possession of the entire estates.

Therefore it would not suit his purpose to let Abel come in contact with the persecuted heiress, much less in the humour he then appeared to be.

"I am old, Wild, now," he said; "I have no children of my own; I cannot hope to retain much longer the estates and wealth I have held wrongful possession of for so many years. Therefore I wish, ere it be too late, to atone for what I have done."

"Still harping on the same string."

"I cannot help it! God knows, I cannot help it!" cried the wretched man, as he sprang nervously to his feet and paced the room.

Surely what he then saw ought to have made Jonathan aware that there is such a thing as retribution for evil deeds in this world, and that punishment of sins begins on earth; but he did not. He only mocked at his companion's weakness, for so he termed it.

"I shall have some trouble with him yet, I am afraid; curses on his pusillanimity. I will make another attempt, and see how far I am successful."

Lord Donmull had again thrown himself into his chair.

"Look here, my lord. Listen to me."

"What is it?"

"You are out of health. The harass of the last few weeks, coupled with the fatigue you have undergone, has worn you out. A few days' rest will put all right again, and then I shall hear you thank me for persuading you to act as I do."

"What do you advise?"

"In the first place to make a strong effort to dismiss the whole of this business from your mind."

"I cannot."

"You must try."

"I tell you I cannot."

"But what have you to dread?"

His lordship was silent.

"Drink, my lord, and listen. Including our two selves there are six persons acquainted with your secret!"

"Six persons! What?"

"Wait and hear me out. From yourself and from me you ought not to dread anything. That reduces the number to four."

"Well?"

"Blueskin, or Blake, as I believe his name was, is dead. You saw me strike him down with my own hand."

"I did—I did! I shudder now when I think of that night's work!"

"Pho—pho! That, then, reduces the number to three. Now listen, and I will tell you the situation of those three persons, and show you how powerless they are to do you any mischief. Are you listening?"

"I am."

"First, then, there is Steggs. For his fate, let it be what it may, you cannot possibly feel any compunction. He is my prisoner. I hold his life in my hands. Do you fear him now?"

"No," replied his lordship, shuddering, "No."

"Of course not; and the number is reduced to two. One is Jack Sheppard, the young villain who mauled you so, and prevented your succeeding in your first attempt."

"Curse him, yes! he stole my watch, too, which I would not have parted with for a hundred guineas."

"Ha! ha! my lord, you get the better of your fears when you think of your revenge! It is only natural. I, too, have a score to settle with that individual! At the present moment he is a prisoner in one of the strongest cells of Newgate, charged with the commission of a burglary, which charge I can substantiate. His fate may be looked upon, then, as settled; so the six persons who hold your dangerous secret are reduced to one, and that one is a poor weak girl, also a prisoner in my power. Say, then, would it not be cowardly in the extreme to give in when all is so secured within your grasp. Am I to have all the trouble of bringing things to their present successful point for nothing? You could not wish such a thing! Say but the word, and your niece shall be removed from your path by death, or if taking her life is repugnant to you, she can remain as long as you think proper in her present habitation. Or steps may be taken to induce her to sign a legal transfer of all her estates to you. But you are not equal to the task of deciding now, therefore I say let things remain as they are awhile; they can safely do so."

"I will, Wild, I will!"

Lord Donnull rose as he spoke.

"Oh!" he added, "if I had a mind, a heart, a head like yours, I should be happy."

"Shake off your groundless fears! Seek change of scene, do anything to keep this from your recollection, until, feeling calmer, you can return to me, decide what is to be done, and the matter will be then entirely settled."

"I will! I am much better and firmer now. Good day, Wild, good day."

"Good day!" replied Wild, as he showed him out. "The weak-headed fool!" he added, mentally, "but he deserves to perish, and perhaps it is better as it is. My path may be all the easier and smoother for it. I must have a few hours quiet thought before I shall be able to decide upon the best mode of action. But the estates shall be mine, wholly mine! I swear it! I will then quit this mode of life, for I am getting sick of it, and if I am not careful the government, whose ready and unscrupulous agent I have for so long been, will turn against me, and I shall perish! But I will guard against such a contingency as that, for with such wealth as I should then possess I should be able to defy them all. I will think—I will think."

Jonathan seated himself at the table, and, clasping his head in his hands, he gave himself up to profound and lengthened thought, and took a survey of his present and future prospects.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

JONATHAN WILD PROCEEDS TO EXECUTE A FOULER CRIME THAN ANY OF WHICH HE HAS YET BEEN GUILTY.

It is night in Jonathan Wild's house in Newgate-street. From no window in that wretched habitation beams forth the faintest ray of light. All is as dark and cheerless as the minds of the poor prisoners who languish in his cells.

The oil lamp in the hall is burning dimly. It casts around it strange, oddly-shaped, moving shadows, such as would fill the nervous with alarm.

Tonks is on the lock.

He is not actually asleep, but in a half-conscious state, from which the least sound or motion would be sufficient to arouse him.

At the iron grating leading to the cells is, as usual, seated another of the gang.

Down the dark staircase which creaks beneath his tread comes a human form.

His steps are stealthy, but the two men on the watch hear them, and are on the alert accordingly.

The dark figure finishes the descent of the stairs, and stands in the gloomy hall.

The iron lamp gives out sufficient light to reveal him plainly, and one ray in particular falls upon the face—that face which it would be impossible to mistake.

Jonathan Wild.

He sees Tonks is awake, and turning to the man at the grating, finds him awake also.

"A lantern," he said to the latter, "quick!"

The man took from under the seat upon which he sat a lighted bull's-eye lantern, which he gave into his employer's hand.

Then he unlocked the grating, and held it open to allow him to pass through.

Wild's errand was to the cells.

But why did he choose that lone and silent hour of the night to execute it?

That was best known to himself.

For certain is it a villainy of no ordinary kind that he meditates; for as he creeps along the corridor, his limbs tremble, and he difficultly draws his breath in short unequal gasps.

Is the cell in which Steggs is confined his destination?

No, for in his progress the light falls upon the door of No. 7; not there does he pause, but keeps on and on until the middle of the passage where the lamp hung is reached.

There he stops.

All around him is very still. Without any great effort of the imagination, he could fancy himself the sole inhabitant of some subterranean city of the dead.

He can hear his own breathing, and the rapid and irregular beating of his own heart.

He takes from his pocket a rather large-sized key, and, holding it in his grasp, approaches one of the cell doors with it.

His hands shake.

The key rattles in the keyhole.

The lantern casts strange moving shadows on the walls.

The tremulous motion of Jonathan's hands gradually communicates itself over his whole body, and he trembles from head to foot.

What can it be that bold bad man is about to do?

Surely one would think there was no crime or evil deed, the commission of which would produce such an effect upon him.

But that such was the case there was abundant evidence.

From this it must be certain that the guilt is of more than ordinary blackness.

At length, after some fruitless efforts, he controlled his nervous agitation, and succeeded in introducing the key into the lock.

The bolt was shot back.

The door flung open.

Then a faint cry of affright and aversion reaches his ears from the interior of the cell.

The voice was feminine.

The cell which he thus entered, then, at that dead hour of the night was the one in which Edgworth Bess was confined.

Jonathan, casting from him all remnants of human nature, then strode into the cell.

He placed the lantern on a little bracket high up in the wall, in such a position that its light was tolerably well diffused about the dungeon.

Edgworth Bess had upon his entrance risen to her feet, and shrank back as far as she could into one corner of the cell.

The shadow of some frightful coming evil, which it would be out of her power to avert, had cast itself over her soul.

Wild contemplated her for some moments in silence, and then he uttered the one word—

"Well?"

Bess fixed her eyes upon his face, and, by an effort, commanded her voice.

"Why do you come here?" she asked. "Seek not to tempt me. It will be of no avail."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wild, reassuming his ordinary brutal manner to a great extent. "Ha! ha! You do not know what good is in store for you. Ha! ha!"

"Good?" said Bess, "that I am sure can never come from you to me, for we are enemies!"

"You don't know that, girl," said Jonathan, approaching her. "Don't shrink back. You have nothing to fear! After the little explanation which I gave you this morning, and which of course, by this time, you have attentively considered, you will be able, without any difficulty, to understand me!"

"I do not wish to do so. I am here your prisoner, and as I am well aware, in your power!"

"Ha! ha! You admit that?"

"I do, but yet I will not believe that all the rest is as you have told me, but cling with my latest breath to the belief that Jack or Blueskin will rescue me from this place."

"I am not afraid of them," said Wild, "knowing well how very safe and out of all power of doing mischief they are. Listen to me; I have thought much, and have come to a determination from which neither heaven nor hell shall move me."

"Impious villain!"

"Ha! ha! you shall know it, my dear—you shall know it, for I can assure you it very intimately concerns the pair of us. Ha! ha! Guess, now, what it is! You women are quick in taking hints, and clever at arriving at conclusions by intuition. Ha! ha! What do you think is my determination?"

"I do not wish or care to know; but that it is rascality of some description I already know you well enough to feel confident."

"We are complimentary to each other. All this, however, is folly and waste of time. Come here, girl, I say, and listen! Your uncle is wholly in my power, and he only lives at the present moment because it suits me to let him do so. I can prophesy that he will not live to be a patriarch."

Bess shuddered, and strove to shrink yet further away, but Wild, springing forward, caught her by the arm, and drew her towards him.

Shriek upon shriek came from her lips as she found his hand upon her, and she struggled violently to get free.

So shrill were the tones, that Jonathan could not make his voice heard above them.

"Silence!" he yelled. "Silence! or I will do you a mischief. Do you hear me? be silent!"

Her dread that he might lay his hands upon her more than he had already done made her quiet.

"That is reasonable of you, and still further display your good sense by listening to me. If it is possible I should like to use you gently, but if you provoke me to violence the consequences must be upon your own head."

Bess deemed it prudent to obey him. Indeed, so great was her terror that she was scarcely aware of what she was about.

This compliance with his demand pleased Wild.

"You know as well as I do," he said, "that you are the heiress of immense estates and wealth to no inconsiderable amount. You are the last of your race. Now I alone have the power of restoring to you your possessions. It is impossible for you to obtain them except with my assistance. This assistance I am ready and willing to afford you if you will accede to my proposals. Speak! will you do so?"

"What are they?"

Wild hesitated when the question was put to him.

Bess noticed it, and wondered what infamy there was behind his proposition.

She repeated her question.

"I may as well tell you at once," said Wild. "The proposal is a very easy one. It is that you become my wife!"

"Your wife?" repeated Edgworth Bess, shuddering with horror at the bare idea. "I your wife?"

"Yes; Mrs. Wild, you know! Mrs. Jonathan Wild! Come, my dear. When you know me I am sure you will like me better than that young villain, Jack Sheppard. Come, say yes, and all will be well. You shall quit this wretched cell for a place suited for you."

"Silence!" cried Bess. "Never could I have believed that you would have had the audacity to make so barefaced a proposal to me. Let one word suffice. Know that I reject your terms with the utmost disgust and contempt. Leave the cell!"

Jonathan's brows lowered.

His countenance darkened, and assumed a demoniac expression.

"Beware!" he said, in a deep, hoarse voice, "beware! You seem not to remember that I am master here—that you are wholly and entirely in my power!"

"I care not! My resolve is unchangeable! Rather than consent, I would die a thousand deaths!"

"Beware!" said Wild again, and still more ominous and awful became the expression on his face. "I have told you that it was my wish to act gently towards you. I have offered you fair means. You have scorned me. The result will be that I shall have to use force—foul means to compel you to comply with my demands. If you repent afterwards the fault will be no one's but your own!"

"Heaven help me!"

"You have need of such a prayer. Be wise, and yield at once. I am determined to achieve my purpose. You shall be my wife, and the Donnull estates and wealth mine—mine!"

"Help! help!" shrieked Edgworth Bess, as though there was the horrible consciousness upon her soul that there was no help for her. "Help! help! Mercy! mercy!"

"Do you consent?"

"Never—never!"

"Then, as I have told you, the consequences will be upon your own head. I can force you to yield, and I will do so. Do not look for any consideration from Jonathan Wild! Consent, then, to be my wife, or ere you are another hour older, you shall implore it as a favour at my hands."

With a great effort Bess preserved her consciousness, but it was only the conviction that if she swooned she would be wholly at his mercy that enabled her to master the feeling, and with a boldness that surprised even herself she repeated her refusal.

"You must take the consequences, then!" said Wild, and he seized her in his powerful arms.

In his grasp she was like a child in the hands of a giant.

Still she struggled as well as she could, but, alas! vainly.

The villainous thief-taker forced her down.

But just when he was about to achieve his purpose, he heard the hasty rush of footsteps, an exclamation, and then some one seized him by the throat.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

JACK SHEPPARD RATHER ASTONISHES MR. NOAKES AND THE TURNKEYS.

We think it quite time we returned to Jack Sheppard, whom we last left in such a ticklish position in Newgate.

It will be recollected that he only ascended the stairs far enough to take him round the first turn in them, and then he had crouched down and peeped cautiously over the balusters at the scene which was taking place below.

The governor, with an air of great bewilderment, was standing on the threshold of the room, the door of which Jack had opened.

In the passage were some half-dozen turnkeys, who, having completely demolished the green baize door, were endeavouring to tell him what had taken place.

Then Jack had made a mental remark about there being some sport, and had announced his intention of staying where he then was in order to see it out.

Now, however daring this resolution might be, and however much it may be admired on that account, yet it is very certain that it was anything but a prudent one.

But Jack had very little prudence. On the contrary, a



[JACK SHEPPARD ASTONISHES THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.]

reckless bravery and insane contempt of danger were two prominent features in his mental composition, and so they continued to be throughout the whole of his extraordinary and unparalleled career.

As all know, it proved his downfall in the end.

Now Jack, on this occasion, thought it the finest thing in the world to do as he did. He looked upon it as a capital piece of fun.

The thought of how much he might jeopardize his chance of escape never troubled him for a moment.

So, leaning over, as we have said, he looked with the greatest curiosity and interest on the actions of his enemies below.

He took especial care, though, not to make any slight noise, or permit any glimmer of the lantern to escape that might betray his presence.

"What is it?" roared the governor, as he looked at the turnkeys and the demolished door. "What is it, I say?"

"Break jail, Mr. Noakes! break jail! Smythies is in

the corridor with all his clothes stripped off him, and his head smashed."

"Who has escaped? Somebody opened my door just now, peeped in, and then shut it again."

"Jack Sheppard's escaped! He's dressed in Smythies' clothes, and I saw some one like him come through the other door just now."

"Jack Sheppard escaped!" yelled Mr. Noakes. "Fools! why was he not secured properly? Some one must have aided him; he could never have escaped by himself!"

"He must be close at hand," said a voice.

"Search, then, and don't stand there like fools! Divide, and search for him. If he has escaped from his cell, he has not got out of Newgate!"

As soon as he heard these instructions given, Jack thought it was high time he retired, so he set about doing so at once.

But he moved slowly and cautiously.

And well it was he did so, for on the topmost stair was

some object, which, if he had come upon it unawares and suddenly, would certainly have thrown him down and made discovery certain.

That object was one which, on the staircases of idle and untidy people, is often found, to the great peril of those who might be ascending or descending.

It was an iron pail.

Jack could not at first make out what it was that stood in his way, but there came up sufficient light from the hall below to show him upon a second glance.

Then an idea darted into his head that he might with it disconcert his enemies, who, he could hear, had already commenced to mount the staircase.

He put down the lantern, and took up the bucket.

By the weight it evidently contained some liquid, but what he did not care.

To descend about half-a-dozen of the stairs and peep over the balusters took him but a second.

"Hoy!" he cried at the top of his voice.

The effect of this was to make those who were ascending pause suddenly upon the impulse of the moment.

Then, before they could recover from their surprise, he caught hold of the bucket by the handle and the rim at the bottom of it, and flung the whole of its contents in their faces.

The water came from a sufficient height to dash with a considerable degree of force into their faces, and they staggered back.

Then, to complete their discomfort, Jack threw the bucket down, and without waiting to see where or upon whom it alighted, sprang up the stairs, caught hold of the lantern, and seeing the staircase led up to another story, mounted it without hesitation.

The cries of those who had had this unexpected attack made upon them quickly brought others to the spot, and, instantly surmising what had happened, they rushed up stairs in a body after the escaping prisoner.

Jack had just reached the landing on the second story when he heard them.

He paused, undecided.

"I shall have some trouble now," he said; "I am like a rat in a large trap, and it will be no easy matter for me to find an outlet. What shall I do?"

There were several doors opening from the landing upon which he stood, and also a narrower flight of stairs leading apparently to the top rooms in the house, for it was in that part of Newgate which was specially set aside for the domestic requirements of the governor that he now found himself.

Whether it would be better to ascend the remaining stairs, or to seek some hiding place in one of the rooms on the second story was rather a serious question.

But he had no time for consideration.

His pursuers in a moment or two would be upon him. Therefore it was necessary he should immediately decide. A little circumstance occurred which at once caused him to make up his mind.

The turnkeys who were pursuing him stopped on the first floor to search the rooms, so as to make sure their prisoner should not escape them by hiding in any one of the chambers.

"They will stay to search these, too," Jack said, alluding to those on the second floor, "and if I go up higher I shall have all the more time."

His premise was one that might easily be deduced.

The attic stairs, for such they were, he reached the top of in a very short time indeed.

Here he found the doors of two rooms only.

He looked up, thinking that in all probability he should find a trap-door leading on to the roof, as is usual in all London houses.

But nothing of the kind met his view, so he opened the door nearest to him, and entering the room, silently closed it after him.

His first care was to look to the fastenings of the door, so as to be in a position to guard against a sudden surprise.

But he found the only thing that served to secure the door was a common latch—there was not even a bolt.

"I don't know that it makes much difference," he muttered; "such a door as that would be no obstacle to them."

He turned round to see whether the place afforded any capabilities for concealment.

In one corner was a little bedstead with white hangings, such a one as would be used for children to sleep in.

A few chairs were placed around the walls.

On one side were several good-sized boxes.

The fireplace and the window completed the catalogue of visible objects.

The prospect was not encouraging, but Jack Sheppard was not one to allow himself to be dismayed by a few obstacles. He set about making the best of his position.

The window he thought would be the best chance for him, so he made his way to it.

On the floor, however, he saw a piece of twine, which he stooped and picked up.

Then, threading it through the ring at the top of the lantern, he tied it round his neck.

This left him with both his hands at liberty.

It is necessary to caution the reader against falling into the mistake that these events, which from their nature have taken us some time to describe, were really long in happening. Jack was very nimble in his movements, and when he reached the window the men had just begun to ascend the attic stairs.

It was a little latticed-casement with diamond frames set in lead.

It opened with a touch.

Outside all was darkness.

Not one single individual object was he able to distinguish.

There was nothing to guide him.

He naturally hesitated, but he heard the men almost upon the threshold of the little room.

"I must risk it," he said. "I can but lose my life, and better be killed by a fall than swing at Tyburn!"

This last consideration determined him, so he got on to the table, and let himself slip feet foremost out of the window.

He kept a firm grasp upon the woodwork.

At last he lowered himself till he hung at the full extent of his arms.

Then, cautiously shifting one hand, he clutched the outside portion of the window sill.

The next thing was to close the window.

This being merely like a door, was easily and silently done. The only thing was he could not fasten it.

To his delight, however, he found that from some cause or other—damp, probably—it fitted tightly in its setting, so that the probability was that being shut they would not notice it was unfastened.

Scarcely was this done than the door was opened, and Jack saw the room, as he thought, brightly illuminated.

"Not here," said a voice, with a curse appended, which we do not think it worth while to repeat. "We shall lose him, after all!"

"Won't Jonathan be wild?" said one who fancied himself a wag, and in consequence never missed an opportunity, no matter how unseasonable, of displaying his wit.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD HAS SOME HAIRBREADTH ESCAPES IN NEWGATE, AND MAKES A BURGLARIOUS ATTACK ON WILD'S HOUSE.

It is scarcely possible, we opine, to conceive anyone in a more perilous position than Jack Sheppard.

His life depended upon the grasp he kept upon the window sill.

To lose it was certain death.

But there was little fear of this. We have before remarked the extraordinary amount of muscular strength which Jack had in his arms, enabling him to perform many mountebank feats.

His body, too, was only a light weight to sustain.

He thought it would be most prudent to move along the window sill, so that his head should not be in the way, in case the men who were searching the room should open the window.

This he did easily, by moving one hand after the other.

It was perhaps quite as well that he did not know the awful depth he would have fallen if he had chanced to miss his grasp. The knowledge would have unnerved him, for the attic window looked out into a paved yard that was, at the very least, fifty feet below him.

We ought, too, to explain how it was that when he looked out of the window he saw nothing. Few nights are so dark that one cannot distinguish large objects, however dimly.

But the fact was, the yard into which the window looked was only like a square pit, of which the prison walls formed three sides.

These reached to a considerable height above the window, so that what he saw were the black stones which could not have been more than six feet from him.

We mention these circumstances, which may be deemed trivial, but it is our desire to leave nothing unexplained.

We now resume.

Jack moved along the stone until he reached its extremity.

There he stopped and waited.

It was well he did, for the window was flung open.

"He's disappeared, I tell you!" said a voice. "What in the world's the good of looking out there? You know it looks into the little yard, and that's fifty feet down, if it's an inch!"

"So it is!" said another voice. "But don't let us waste time here; he must be in the place somewhere, only we have missed him. Come on!"

"Perhaps he's jumped into the yard."

"Not a bit of it!"

"I don't know that! Look, there's some one in the yard with a light! Call out to know who it is!"

There was some one down in the yard, as the little moving star-like light sufficiently evidenced, and a gruff voice replied—

"What's the row?"

"Oh! it's Clarke!" said one of those at the window, who happened to recognise the tones. "Clarke!" he cried, in a louder voice.

"Hullo!"

"Is there anyone in the yard? Just look about you, and call out if you see anything suspicious; there's been an escape!"

These words filled Jack with dread.

He was fearful that the man in the yard would, when he looked up, perceive him.

He clung as closely as he could to the wall, covering the lantern with his body.

He was getting exhausted, too. Holding up his arms so long had drained all the blood out of them.

The next words he heard were a great relief to his heart.

It was Clarke who spoke then.

"There's nothing here," he said.

"I told you so!" cried the man, triumphantly, who had from the first disbelieved that Jack had jumped out into the yard. "He ain't the sort to do that."

"You think yourself d—d clever, I know!" replied the other. "He aint here, but he can't be far off."

Then, to Jack's joy, they left the window.

Clarke, too, had passed out of the yard.

But Jack's position seemed scarcely better than it had been. In his exhausted state, how was he to leave the window-sill, except by letting go his hold?

He endeavoured to cast an anxious glance around.

It is wonderful how soon the eyes become accustomed to darkness. At first he was quite unable to do so, but now he could define the gloomy prison walls.

He found that the end of the window-sill upon which he hung was close to one of the angles where the walls of the governor's house joined that of the prison.

In that angle was a leaden rain pipe.

He found he could reach it easily.

Then he looked up.

The roof of one part was only a few feet above him.

Recollecting his perilous adventure at the Grange, when a similar pipe had been of such assistance to him, he resolved to try what he could do with this one.

It was an awful and desperate attempt, but he resolved to make it.

Very cautiously, for his arms were tired and stiff, he shifted his grasp from the stone to the pipe.

It was about three inches in diameter, and far enough from the corner to enable him to take a firm hold of it.

He clutched with his other hand.

As he committed his whole weight to it, he felt for one moment the most horrible sensation imaginable.

His heart turned sick.

The pipe bent and gave way at the same time, creaking and cracking dismally.

He made sure it would precipitate him into the yard. But it did not. It gave way so far, and then stopped. Finding this to be the case, he took heart again and began to climb.

The ascent was difficult.

But he was climbing for his life, and it is really wonderful what can be done under such a feeling.

He felt himself endowed with fresh strength when he found he had escaped this great danger.

Up he went with the agility of a monkey.

The most difficult part of his task was now before him.

How would he draw himself over the parapet?

It would have been utterly impossible had not fortune favoured him.

The pipe did not come from the roof of the governor's house, but from the top of the prison, which, just in that part, was some feet higher.

So he was able to climb up until he could put his feet upon the parapet, which he was very glad to do.

He remained just in that position for a minute or two, in order to recover himself; a little more, and he would have been utterly exhausted.

But his having so far succeeded in his hazardous attempt encouraged him to make fresh efforts.

He stepped off the parapet on to the roof, which was flat and covered with lead.

He still kept the lantern carefully concealed beneath the ample coat which he had taken from the turnkey. He would have extinguished it, only he did not know what circumstances would arise to make it useful, and he had no means of relighting it.

He considered it would be best to run the risk of its being seen.

What he should do next was rather an anxious question.

He had escaped from his cell, it is true, but he had not got free from Newgate, nor was it very clear how he was going to do so.

It would do no good, though, to remain where he was. He could see a great deal of confusion was going on in the prison, and it would not be long before they searched the roofs.

In fact, they would have done so earlier only they knew there was no means of reaching them, besides which, the idea had firm hold of them that Jack was secreted somewhere inside.

The roof was a flat one, and Jack crossed it without any trouble.

Finding a place where it was practicable, he mounted to the higher portion.

As he stood there he could see the dome of St. Paul's cathedral towering above all objects, and looking nearly thrice its ordinary size in the murky light.

That was the index he wanted to show him the direction he ought to take, for all that he had so far done had been performed with a definite object in view.

What that object was the reader can no doubt guess. If he cannot, he must wait until events develop it.

Har'—, then, seen the dome of the cathedral, he made his way across the roofs to one particular point.

Many obstacles presented themselves before him in his course, but he overcame them, one and all.

More than once he reached a place from whence a view of some of the yards could be obtained, and even a view that this occurred, and he looked down, he saw people with lights hurrying backwards and forwards.

At length Jack reached that portion of Newgate which abuts upon Newgate-street.

An indefinable impulse made him peep over.

Below him was the by day busy, but now silent street.

In the centre of the road was a row of officers, who had been placed there to insure the impossibility of his leaving the prison.

Jack smiled at the precaution, and moved onwards. Evidently he had no thought of descending into Newgate-street.

There could be no doubt, now, as to his destination, for on reaching that portion of the parapet which runs from Newgate-street at right angles, he first looked over carefully, then climbed over it, and dropped on to the roof of the adjoining house.

That gloomy, rambling, dilapidated building which simple people looked up to with a shudder as they passed.

That house in which was contained so vast an amount of villainy, cruelty, suffering, and sin.

That house, whose tenant was an arch fiend in human form.

That house the reader of this history so well knows.

Jonathan Wild's house.

It was on to this roof that Jack Sheppard alighted, and without loss of time set about the task of discovering some means of entering it.

This he was not long in doing.

In the tiles was the covering of a large trap do

Jack stooped down and tried to raise it.

It was fast.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD'S SECRET ENTRANCE TO THE CELLS IS DISCOVERED BY JACK, WHO AVAILS HIMSELF OF IT.

WITH a sudden wrench, and putting forth all his strength, Jack caused the door to partially give way.

The woodwork of which it was composed was old and rotten.

Another such an effort, and he would be able to enter.

To enter! How strange it seemed, after using such incredible exertions, going through so many perils, having so many hairbreadth escapes of death and capture, to leave one prison, that he should voluntarily enter another—for such Jonathan Wild's house indisputably was.

But Jack had an incentive powerful enough to make him willing, nay, anxious, to endure all danger that could possibly exist.

He had not forgotten that the last time he saw the girl he loved so well, and who so unreservedly returned his affection, was when Jonathan had borne her struggling into his dwelling.

Since then what had occurred to her he did not dare to think of. Her enemies he knew were dead enough to all human pity to hesitate to take her young and innocent life, and he trembled and sickened at the thought that even at that very moment she was no longer of this world.

If this was so, he felt that life would have no further charms for him.

The only sunshine it had ever known was shed upon it by her presence, and if he lost her he felt he should lose all that made existence at all endurable.

But despite all he knew of Wild's capabilities to commit any atrocity, he could scarcely reconcile himself to the belief that he would be able to slay her.

Oh! could it but have been whispered to him that the danger which menaced her was a thousand times worse than death itself, what prompt and effectual measures he would have taken to prevent it.

Jack raised the trap-door, and laid it back upon the tiles.

A square of pitchy darkness was at his feet.

Now was the time the lantern which he carried would be valuable, and it was in anticipation of some such event as this that he had taken the pains and run the risks he had to keep it burning.

Cautiously kneeling down on the tiles, and screening the light to the utmost of his power, so that no wandering beam should indicate his presence, he drew the lantern from beneath his ample overcoat, and lowered it into the abyss.

He could see the floor.

It was about six feet below him.

This was enough.

Replacing the lantern, he took up the trap-door, and, at the lower portion, fixed it in its place, then let it fall, and to his pleasure saw that, to a casual glance, it bore no traces of being tampered with. This done, he raised the upper end a little way, and slid his body through feet foremost.

Then holding for a moment by the framework with his hands to steady himself a little, and feeling sure the flooring could not be above six inches from his feet, he let go his grasp, and dropped the distance.

As he did so the trap-door fell into its proper place, though the feat was performed at the expense of the skin on the back of his fingers.

The noise he made in alighting was very trifling, but yet he thought if he had only taken the precaution to pull

off his boots, it would not have endangered his being heard by any one.

It was not too late to act upon this hint. It might be of the utmost importance to him that his footfalls should should not be heard, so he immediately sat down, took off his boots, and stuffed them into his coat-pockets.

Then, partially masking the lantern with his coat, he stole forward upon tip-toe to the head of the staircase.

Here he listened for a moment, and finding all was still, descended with the silence of a spectre.

The upper portion of Wild's house was but little used. Of this fact, however, Jack was ignorant. Had he not been so, he might have been spared some trouble.

To be over-cautious, though, was but to err on the right side.

"She would, of course, be taken to the dungeons," thought Jack, "but in what way am I to reach them? Not by the ordinary mode, that is quite certain, for there would sure to be a man at the grating. How shall I manage it? My best course, I should fancy, would be to get to the back of the house. If I find the yard, I may stand a chance of discovering some means of getting in!"

These were the reflections that crossed Jack's mind as he crept down the second flight of stairs.

Hearing and seeing nothing, he ventured to take out his lantern, and look about him.

Facing him on the landing was a little window, which, from its position, he felt certain looked out on the back of Wild's house.

He covered the lantern again, went towards it, and silently opened it.

To have now shown the light, although it would have been of great service to him, would be too hazardous, so he contented himself with straining his eyes to see what was outside.

Below him he could faintly distinguish the roof of some outbuilding, but it was too far off for it to be safe for him to drop from that window upon it.

But he calculated that he should find on the landing beneath a similar window, and such proved to be the case when he descended.

As he expected, he found the tiled roof of this outbuilding was in its highest part just about level with the window.

This was the very thing, so he cautiously got through, and closed it after him.

On his hands and knees, and clutching tightly to the tiles, he crept down.

When he reached the bottom, he found he should have no difficulty in reaching the yard, which he could see was one of unusually limited dimensions.

In fact, as the quondam mistress of the house, Mary Milliner, had many a time in days past, when speaking upon the size of it, elegantly remarked that it "wasn't large enough to swing a cat in."

Jack reached the ground in perfect safety.

From no one of the windows he could see came the least light.

The inmates of all had apparently retired to rest.

Perceiving this, he ventured to take out his lantern to make an examination of the place.

The first thing that he noticed was a door in the wall. It was secured with two massive bolts—one at the top and one at the bottom.

A long time must have elapsed since they were used, for they were rusted in their settings.

Now, whether this door would lead him at all in the direction he wished to go, or whether it was merely some disused mode of exit from Wild's house, Jack could not tell, and the only way by which he could arrive at such knowledge would be to withdraw the bolts and see.

This he did at once, though it gave him a great deal of trouble.

At last, however, he got the door open.

No words could convey an adequate idea of the anxiety with which he proceeded to look where the door led.

He felt somewhat, but not altogether disappointed.

His last surmise was the correct one.

The door opened into a long, narrow passage, and the odour that saluted his nostrils was sufficient proof that it had a direct communication with Newgate-market, which was then in a much worse sanitary condition than it is now.

"Good," said Jack; "this, I hope, will furnish me with the means of making my retreat in case I should succeed in what I am about. I may want to leave in a hurry, so I will leave the door open as it is."

This determination he at once acted upon, and then turned his investigations in another direction.

It should be observed that Wild had, from time to time, made some very considerable alterations in the back part of his house, and all that Jack saw was quite new and strange, and altogether unlike any other house which he had previously seen.

There was one other door, but that led into the outhouse kind of place, the roof of which had enabled him to reach the yard.

This door he did not attempt to open. From its position he felt quite sure it led into the ground-floor, which was the part of the house, above all others, to be avoided.

He next turned his attention to the floor of the yard.

It had once been paved with large flagstones, but now they were completely hidden by the accumulation of rubbish upon them.

This he somehow thought owed its presence there more to design than accident, and he began to remove some portion of it.

In doing so he found in one of them an iron ring.

What he sought, then, he imagined was in his grasp, and, seizing the ring with both hands, he endeavoured to raise the stone.

But it remained immovable.

The thought then struck him that the ring might be so constructed as to turn round, and so undo the fastening.

To have such a thought, and then to set about trying whether such was the case, were simultaneous events.

His supposition proved correct.

The ring turned as the knob of a door might do.

Then he once more essayed to raise the stone.

This time he raised it with the greatest ease.

His heart beat violently when he found a flight of winding steps were disclosed.

Before he descended them, however, he took care that the stone slab was so placed that it could not by any accident fall back into its setting. When he had done this, he went down without hesitation.

It terminated at the bottom before a stone wall.

But Jack knew well enough that such a staircase would not be constructed without an object, so he looked closely and carefully about him for some indications of a secret door.

For a long time nothing met his gaze, until at last he noticed on the bottom step a small iron knob.

This he pressed upon, and one of the stones in the solid wall moved aside.

He was about to crawl through the opening, when a succession of screams of the most awful character reached his ears, and seemed to drive him back.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

JACK SHEPPARD, AFTER ALL HIS TROUBLE, ONLY CHANGES ONE DUNGEON FOR ANOTHER.

FOR only an instant, though, was Jack under the dominion of this feeling.

He recognised that voice.

It was Edgeworth Bess.

He dashed through the opening like a madman, and, with the cries still ringing in his ears, made his way along a passage which he knew instantly, being the one in which Sir Marmaduke's dungeon was situated.

How he opened the secret door communicating with the outer series of dungeons he knew not, and did not pause to see. It was sufficient that it did open, and he passed through.

Another second, and he was at the dungeon door, which Jonathan, when he entered, had left open.

To his horror and amazement he saw Edgeworth Bess struggling in Wild's arms.

It was Jack Sheppard, therefore, who, uttering an exclamation, dashed forward and grasped the thief-taker by the throat, as related in the eighty-first chapter of this history.

This attack was so utterly unexpected, that Wild was

taken by surprise, and, in the confusion of the moment, let go his hold upon his prisoner.

Who his assailant was he could not conceive.

He wrenched his head round.

A cry of rage and astonishment burst from his lips as soon as he beheld Jack Sheppard.

"Wretch!" he yelled, grappling with him, "to-night you have signed your own death-warrant! How you came here I cannot guess, but you shall never leave it again in life."

"We'll see about that," cried Jack. "Cheer up, Bess! Do not be afraid."

"I knew you would save me," she replied, placing herself behind him.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jonathan Wild, making a sudden effort to throw his adversary; "you are both now more completely in my power than you ever were."

Not another word was spoken, for the two commenced in good earnest a deadly struggle.

With a quickly beating heart, and ejaculations of fear, poor Bess watched the conflict.

Alas! Jack stood no chance with Jonathan Wild, even at the best of times. Now he was terribly exhausted by the incredible hardships and exertions he had already undergone.

Still he stood up bravely, and summoned all his strength, but he quickly found himself getting weaker and weaker, while his foe at the same time seemed to be gaining fresh strength.

At last, Jonathan, taking a firmer hold, forced him backwards, so that, to save himself from falling, he had to sink upon his knees.

Seeing this, Bess herself sprang forward, and strove to interpose her form between the combatants.

"Fly! Bess, fly!" exclaimed Jack, between his teeth, while the perspiration ran down his face like rain-drops. "Fly! He will conquer me, but leave me to myself. Fly! fly!"

"Never without you," she replied. "Never—never!"

"Take that, then, for being a fool!" said Wild, ferociously; and, as he spoke, he raised his heavy foot, and kicked the poor girl with it brutally, so that she was forced to let go her hold, and shrink back shrieking with pain.

This was an act that filled Jack with fury. Instantly he felt himself endowed with the strength of a dozen men.

He once more struggled to his feet, and, for a moment, he seemed as though he would gain the mastery over his foe.

But, alas! for both of them, the factitious accession of strength which he experienced departed almost as quickly as it came, leaving him all the more exhausted in consequence.

Again did Jonathan force him down.

This time Jack felt perfectly assured that he would never be able to rise again, without some extraordinary event happened to change the current of events, and so he called to Bess, who was moaning with pain.

"Bess, darling!" he cried, "if you love me, do as I direct; it is the only chance we have. Fly, and leave me! Fly, I implore you, and escape! I will try my utmost to keep this fiend from following you. Let this be the test of your love. Fly, dearest! Turn to the left when you leave this place, and keep straight on. You cannot miss your way. I have left all the doors open. You will find yourself in Newgate-market. There you will meet some one of whom you can ask succour. Fly, dearest! fly, I entreat you!"

These words were jerked out rather than spoken, while he continued his struggle with Wild. It would have reached an earlier termination—for Jonathan would not for a moment have hesitated to take his life—only, before he descended to the cells, he had divested himself of all his arms, not for a moment anticipating that he would have any use for them.

It was to this simple circumstance that Jack, on that occasion, was indebted for his life.

Adjured as she thus was, Bess could scarcely do otherwise than obey, though it was with extreme reluctance that she did so.

"Fly with all possible speed," said Jack, as he saw her about to depart; "your life and freedom depend upon your fleetness!"

A perfect howl of rage came from Wild's lips when he

learned by the words Jack spoke that the secret exit from the cells was known to him.

It was, he thought, a secret whose existence was locked in his own breast, and he was furious at the thought it should have been discovered. It had cost much time and money in construction. He had intended it as a means by which he should be able to escape, should things so change as to make it necessary for him so to do.

Now it was known, and, consequently, valueless, for the worth of such a thing depended entirely upon its being kept a secret.

Jonathan, too, was much enfeebled by his wounds, or Jack would have never been able to prolong the struggle as he did. Wild had lost a vast quantity of blood, and though he moved about his house as usual, yet he was very far from being so strong as he appeared.

Jack anxiously estimated the time it would take for Bess to get quite clear of Mr. Wild's house.

He clung all the time with such tenacity to Jonathan that he was unable to shake him off.

But at last the limit of Jack's strength and endurance was reached, and Jonathan forced him with his back to the ground.

The thief-taker knelt with one knee upon his breast and clutched him by the throat.

At that moment consciousness left him. He swooned from exhaustion.

For a second or so Wild thought he was dead, and released his grip.

Then he saw what had happened.

He caught him again by the throat as though he intended to convert that seeming death into a reality.

But at that moment a change came over his intentions.

"He will keep," he said, in a significant tone, as he rose to his feet. "The girl cannot have gone far, and I will go after her. Curses on the young viper; had it not been for him I should by this time have achieved my purpose. How came he out of Newgate? Curses on their negligence. But I will have it seen to."

While he muttered these sentences, Jonathan left the cell, and, locking the door after him, placed the key carefully in his pocket.

Then he hurried along the passage to the secret door leading to the second lot of cells. Through this he passed and slammed it after him; then through the hole in the stonework which led to the little winding staircase.

This he also closed. He was not desirous of making any more people acquainted with the secret, and those who did know it he determined should pay for that knowledge with their lives.

Up the staircase, into the yard—taking the same pains to conceal the mode by which he had made his exit—down the passage and into the old market he went, with all possible speed.

But when he reached it all was dark and deserted.

The intricacies of the place were very familiar to him, but he hesitated which way to take.

"She would run straight on, no doubt," he muttered; "and that is the course I will follow. She cannot get far away, and I shall be sure to find her."

But in this he miscalculated.

About a minute and a half brought him into Warwick-lane.

There no one was either in sight or hearing.

It would be folly for him to attempt to pursue her, for he could have no possible idea of the route which she had taken.

He rested his chin on his hands in deep thought.

If he summoned any of his men to his assistance, and he could have done so without any further trouble than blowing a whistle, which he carried suspended round his neck, they would not only be surprised to find him there, but the intelligence that they were to search for an escaped prisoner would at once open their eyes to the fact that there was some mode of leaving the cells with which they were unacquainted.

Jonathan swore awfully.

"It's that Jack Sheppard, curse him! Until he came to me I never had this trouble in executing my designs. But he shall pay the full penalty for his interference. The girl has gone. But how came he out of Newgate? I must see to that; but I must first go back by the way I have just come and make all secure."

He turned on his heel as he spoke, and retraced his steps through the market to the cells.

He did not pause at Jack's cell door, though he had half a mind to do so. He was quite safe there, he thought, so he let him be.

Moreover, he had been for a long time absent and thought best to return.

The man at the grating, hearing his approach, let him through.

"I will go to Newgate," said Wild, as he walked to the front door of his house. "I cannot understand how Sheppard could have got here. I will go and see. There must have been great negligence, or else they have connived at his escape."

He went round the corner of the Old Bailey as he spoke, and then, upon arriving at the prison wicket, knocked at it with such fury as almost to split the stout oak iron-studded panels.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

BLUESKIN STARTS FOR LONDON, AND IS ROBBED ON THE HIGHWAY.

UNDER the care and skilful treatment of old Ann, Blueskin gradually recovered from what was as nearly a mortal wound as any wound could possibly be.

But the fact is, the iron bands, which were placed triangularly in his hat, shielded him in a great measure from the blow, and, in addition to this, he happened to possess a skull of tolerable thickness.

Nevertheless, the blow had been enough to fracture it.

Fortunately none of the splinters of bone pressed upon his brain. Had such been the case, either death or insanity would have been the result.

His constitution, too, was strong, and so, in what might be termed an incredibly short space of time, he was able to leave his bed and move about.

After that his recovery was rapid.

When trying to think back upon the past he was much puzzled to separate the real from the unreal. The last circumstance he could recollect with anything like distinctness was the sudden interruption of Jonathan Wild and his myrmidons into the turret-chamber.

Nor was he able to imagine by what means the thief-taker had become acquainted with the secret place of refuge in the old abbey, though, as the reader knows, that information came to him in about the simplest manner possible.

But Blueskin was firmly under the impression that Geoffrey had confided the secret to no one else, and yet Jonathan walked in as though he was perfectly aware of his exact location.

He was forced at last to give up the attempt in despair.

As soon, though, as he was well and strong enough, he made his way to the ruins, but without acquainting anyone with his purpose. He fancied that there he might find something that would afford him a clue.

Of his recovery from the death-like trance in which he had lain for so many hours, and his insane flight into the wood, he recollected nothing, for when those things happened he was under the influence of delirium. He could, however, hazily remember his encounter with the poachers, and the appeal he made to them for his life. All after that was a blank until he woke up in the cottage.

It was a glorious morning when he started on his visit to the abbey. The sky was clear, the air pure, and the sun diffused a comfortable warmth. In the trees the birds sang sweetly, and all seemed beautiful. It was, in fine, one of those fine autumnal days which come, perhaps, once or twice during the season, in order to recall to our minds a more vivid idea of what the departed summer was like.

It was a day which could not fail to brace the nerves and invigorate the frame of the invalid, and Blueskin found it made a great difference to him.

The abbey was but about a quarter of an hour's walk from the cottage, so he accomplished the distance with ease, and without fatiguing himself.

Indeed, he was surprised at his own strength.

The general appearance of the place, as he drew near to it, differed in no respect from that which it bore upon the occasion of his first visit. All seemed unchanged.

But it was with a heavy and an anxious heart that he took the path leading to the little courtyard in which the turret stood. The fate of his master's child and his friend's son filled him with uneasiness. They were in the power of their worst and most dreaded enemy, Jonathan Wild, and therefore the worst was to be anticipated.

The little door was closed, but not locked.

He pushed it open and entered.

As soon as he passed through it shut again, which explained how it was he found it closed.

The courtyard was quite deserted; indeed, to have looked at it, no one would have thought a human foot had trodden it for years.

Blueskin did not pause in his course, but ascended the winding stairs that led up to the turret.

In a few minutes he reached the top and entered.

All within was just as he remembered it to be, with the exception that, upon the floor where he had fallen, was an immense pool of blood, which filled the chamber with a sickening and repulsive odour.

It was a strange sick man's whim, but Blueskin thought he should be better able to think over the occurrences of the past while he sat there than he would be elsewhere.

So, taking one of the rude chairs which had served them for a seat, he placed it near the window, and sat down upon it in such a manner that he could rest his arms upon the massive back and his aching head upon his arms.

Thus he gave himself up to thought.

It would have been far better if he had waited until his energies were more recovered, but he was too impatient to do that.

Utterly vain were all his endeavours to come to some rational conclusion respecting the events which had happened. This, however, was certain, and beyond all dispute: Jonathan had, by some means unknown to him, discovered their hiding-place, and, in concordance with his crafty nature, had stolen upon them, and taken them at unawares.

Well he remembered the attack, and how the thief-taker had himself confronted him. He could guess the rest. He had been struck down and left for dead, while Jack and Edgeworth Bess he had carried off as prisoners.

"That is it, clear enough," he said, rising to his feet, "and it is no good troubling about the rest; he found it out somehow, and turned his knowledge to the best advantage. What may have been the fate of Bess and Jack I tremble to think of. They are alone and friendless at the time when they most needed such assistance as a strong arm, a clear brain, and a willing heart could afford them. I will go back now, and rest for the remainder of the day, then, if I feel well and strong enough, I will set out for London at nightfall."

As he thus expressed his determination, he left the little turret-chamber, and retraced his steps to the cottage.

Having resolved upon a definite course of action, he felt wonderfully better.

"Where are the horses, I wonder, that we left in the court-yard?" he said. "Has Jonathan or his men taken possession of them, or have they strayed away? Be it which it will, it is all the same, they are gone. One of them now would have been of the greatest service to me on my journey."

And so, with his brain busy with various thoughts, he passed the day upon his bed in the little cottage.

Just at sunset, old Ann came in to remove the bandages about his head, and to replace them with new ones.

She pronounced the wound wonderfully better.

"I am glad to hear that," said Blueskin; "I shall always feel grateful to you. Bind it up this time as well as possible, for it will be the last."

"The last?" repeated the old woman, with surprise.

"Yes, it is impossible for me to stay here any longer—I am imperatively called away. Here is a purse. It is a full one, and contains a large amount. Take it in return for what you have done."

"But," remonstrated Ann, "you ought not to think of moving yet. Your wound is better, but it is far from being well; a couple or three days more will put you quite right."

"May be, but I will start to-night. It would do me more harm to stay here in anxiety than it would to start, although I may not be quite well."

"Perhaps so," said the old woman. "But if you will take my advice, you will stay."

Blueskin, however, paid no heed to her words, and when the operation of binding up the wounds was completed, bid them all farewell.

The night was dark, and a cool wind swept over the earth, but this was all the more suited to him, for his blood was heated.

He gained the high road, and pursued it for some distance; then he took a lane that led him in the direction of the city of Oxford.

It was his intention to proceed thither, and then take the coach to London.

But it was decreed that he should be prevented from doing this, for scarcely had he gone half the distance than two dark figures sprang out upon him.

So suddenly and unexpectedly was the attack made that Blueskin had no opportunity of defending himself.

They clutched him on each side.

"Your money!" they cried; "surrender all you have, and peaceably, or you will suffer for it. Your money, I say!"

It was rather strange for Blueskin to be robbed on the highway, but strange things sometimes do happen.

Although he was so weak and in so bad a position to defend himself, yet he did not choose to comply with the demands of these fellows quietly, so striking out right and left, he made a vigorous attack upon them.

He stood, however, no chance. The man on his right side struck him a violent blow under the right ear, which felled him at once.

This done, they proceeded, with the utmost expedition, to rifle his pockets, and soon emptied them of anything that was of the slightest value, and then decamped, first having humanity enough to drag their victim to the side of the road, so that he was in no immediate danger of being run over by any passing vehicle.

About half an hour afterwards Blueskin came to himself.

He rose to his feet and looked about him, with surprise very visibly depicted on his countenance.

Then he all at once recollected what had happened.

"Curse the fellows, they have conquered me," he said; "it might have been worse, and I ought to be the last to complain, for it is no more than I have done many a time."

From this it will be seen that he took rather a philosophic view of the transaction.

It was, nevertheless, vexatious in the extreme, because he was in a strange place, some distance from his destination, and utterly destitute of resources.

His wound was either getting much better, or else his excitement made it appear so.

"There is no help for it," he said; "my only course will be to do as they have done. The worst of it is, though, I am unarmed, and not exactly a fair match for anyone. Never mind, I will try; I have been on the highway before to-night, and somehow or other have always been successful."

Just as he spoke these words, there rose upon the still night air the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and the sound was sufficient to make him aware that a single traveller was approaching the spot upon which he stood at an easy trot.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

RELATES HOW BLUESKIN STOLE A HORSE, AND THEN WENT ON THE HIGHWAY.

"FORTUNE favours me," exclaimed Blueskin. "I will try to take all the advantage of the circumstance within my power. It will be no easy task, though, for me, unarmed and on foot, to stop a man on horseback. It must be done by stratagem."

He could not as yet obtain a glimpse of the approaching horseman, for the lane, about a hundred yards further on, took a sudden bend to the left.

Moreover, the night was too dark a one for objects at any great distance to be distinguishable.

Nearer and nearer, plainer and plainer, grew the sounds.

Blueskin, for a moment, was undecided as to which would be the best stratagem for him to adopt, but he decided upon one that looked rather hazardous.

Choosing, then, the highest part of the roadway, he laid himself down at full length upon his back, assuming, as well as he could, the appearance of a badly-wounded or dead man.

It was a strange way of stopping a horseman, but it would no doubt prove an effective one.

The rider came round the bend of the lane.

He was quite a young man, and rather slightly made.

The horse he bestrode was a magnificent creature, and the way in which it put its feet to the ground showed its perfect breed.

Suddenly the beautiful animal swerved, then stopped, and refused to proceed, except in an odd, sidelong fashion.

It had perceived the object in its path.

The young horseman seemed at first quite at a loss to comprehend the meaning of his steed's unusual behaviour, but upon leaning forward in the saddle, he saw the body of a man in the road.

The first words this youth uttered rather amused and surprised Blueskin.

He spoke in quite an exultant tone of voice.

"Hurrah!" he said. "Here is a real adventure at last! Well, I think its time I had one, considering the nights I have been out. How glorious! Woa, Polly, woa! Steady, mare! Why, its a dead man, I believe! I should just like them to laugh at me after this! I'll astonish them! Its a real romantic adventure, and no mistake! What shall I do, I wonder? Dear me, I don't know! I never had an adventure before, and—and—I don't feel half as comfortable as I thought I should! I'll holler out! Hilloa, there! Hilloa! Who are you? Are you very bad, eh?"

He waited anxiously for a response, but all remained profoundly still.

The horseman began to exhibit signs of evident fright.

"What shall I do, I wonder, eh? I've a good mind to be off. No, I won't, though, or they would laugh at me, and no mistake—to run away after finding an adventure. I'll get off. Perhaps he isn't so bad as he looks."

Thus speaking, this rather singular and very remarkable young man got off his horse with extreme deliberation, and, slipping the bridle over his arm, came forward on foot to where Blueskin lay, who, now he came to find what sort of adversary he had got to deal with, was almost ashamed of the artifice he had used.

But for all that, it proved to him that the idea was a good one, and, likely enough, some day it would be of service to him.

As soon as the young man approached him, he sprang up suddenly, and caught him by the throat.

"Murder!" he cried. "Murder!"

"Silence!" was the reply. "Utter another sound, and you utter your last on earth! I am a desperate man! Quick. Hand me over all that you possess, or your life shall pay the penalty!"

"Yes, good sir. Don't hurt me. I'll do all that you want. You see, I was reading the other day about adventures on the road, so I thought I would come out and try and find some myself. I can assure you that is a fact."

"Then you have nothing to complain of," said Blueskin, who, in spite of himself, could not forbear a smile. "Here's such an adventure as few have had the luck to meet with. Look here."

Knowing he had nothing to fear from the youth in the shape of resistance, he very coolly mounted his horse.

"There," he said. "This will be a rare adventure. Good bye. I'm off!"

"No, no! murder! murder! Stop—that's too much of a joke! Hilloa! Murder! Stop! I say; stop!"

Blueskin, however, heeded him not in the least, but striking his newly-acquired horse on the flanks, he gave him the rein, and its poor deluded owner was quickly out of sight and hearing, having, it may be fair to infer, had a sufficiency of adventure to last him his lifetime.

Blueskin slackened his pace after a little time, for he neither wished to over-fatigue himself or his horse.

His first intention had been to proceed to Oxford, but now he abandoned that idea, and pushed on direct to London.

The horse might be recognised, and himself brought into trouble in consequence.

He made his way across the country by the narrow lanes which intersected it, and at length emerged into the Oxford-road, at some considerable distance from that city.

Feeling the firm, smooth road beneath its feet, the horse showed himself impatient for a gallop, so Blueskin gave him the rein.

His immediate purpose was to proceed to London with all speed possible, and endeavour to ascertain what had been the fate of the two young people in whom he felt so great an interest.

That Jonathan Wild had left him in the turret under the impression that he was dead he felt quite sure, and so he resolved that when he did get to town he would carefully disguise himself, which would make his task all the easier.

But he was not destined to reach London without meeting with a strange adventure.

Besides, he himself determined not to let any chance of getting money pass him by, for what he had taken from the young man who was so fond of romantic adventures was but trifling in amount, and he did not know, of course, how much he would require on reaching London.

The saddle of the horse which he bestrode was furnished with holsters, and he had already satisfied himself that they contained a brace of well-loaded pistols.

And among the various articles he had taken from the owner of the horse were a powder-flask and a case of bullets, so that he was well qualified to make an attack.

His head, too, was wonderfully better; in fact, he only occasionally felt any inconvenience from it.

And so Blueskin, fully equipped as a "knight of the road," rode on at a swinging pace towards London, determined to cry "Stand and deliver!" to whatever passengers he might meet.

Nor was he green at the trade. It was not the first time in his long and adventurous career that he had played the highwayman's part, and always with success.

A glance at his burly frame was sufficient to make even the courageous think twice before they attempted to attack him.

But on that night the road appeared unusually deserted, and he travelled many miles before he met with a single person.

In fact, the hour was rather too late a one for many people to be abroad.

Presently, however, he heard a horse coming towards him at a furious gallop.

"Some one at last," he cried, as he pulled up at the side of the road. "I will stop him, at all events, be he who he may. What a terrific speed he is coming at, to be sure."

The beat of the horse's hoofs, as he brought them both together to the ground, succeeded each other so quickly that they almost made one continuous sound.

It was an unusual circumstance for any one to travel at such a speed. Few horses could have performed it.

Of course, one effect of this was to quickly bring him to where Blueskin laid in wait.

On came the horse like a whirlwind.

Blueskin dashed out into the centre of the road, and then pulled up, facing the approaching steed.

He drew a pistol from the holster.

"Stand!" he cried, at the top of his lungs. "Stand and deliver! Your money or your life!"

As he commenced uttering these words, he saw, faint and indistinct before him, the outlines of a man on horseback.

He fully anticipated that upon seeing such an obstacle, as he was, planted full in his path, that he would pull up, or at least check the headlong progress of his steed, but he appeared to do nothing of the sort.

The horse, however, upon perceiving the obstruction, swerved aside with great suddenness, and before Blueskin could move in the least to prevent it, swept past him on his left with unabated speed.

But the rider was unhorsed, for the sudden movement had caused him to lose his seat.

He fell heavily upon the hard roadway.

This was a result that Blueskin had not expected.

His horse grew alarmed at the strange things taking place, for it was quite unused to them.

Blueskin, however, who was an excellent equestrian,



[THE DISCOVERY OF THE YOUNG MAN'S BODY BY JONATHAN WILD AND PINCHING TOM.]

soon succeeded in calming the creature, and then he turned his attention to the wild rider.

He lay in the roadway, just where he had fallen, without the least motion.

"He is badly hurt, no doubt," he said; "perhaps killed. I hope not. I will see."

He dismounted as he spoke, and, putting his arm through the reins, advanced still closer to where the rider lay.

The horse, however, evinced the utmost unwillingness to follow him.

And now, whether it was that some portion of the horse's terror had communicated itself to him, or what it was, something seemed to make him aware that there was in this affair something more dreadful than met the eye at a first glance.

The man lay in a strange, huddled-up fashion.

When he had succeeded in dragging his horse after him

until he was within about six feet of it, the creature stopped short, planted its fore feet firmly on the ground, and refused to move.

Blueskin was more and more convinced that something unusual had occurred, for he had many a time noticed the keenness of perception which many horses possess.

He took the end of the reins in his left hand, and went forward as far as he could, and looked closely at the body.

It was motionless still, being, in fact, in precisely the same posture as that in which it had fallen.

Afraid, if he released the horse, that he should have some trouble in capturing him again, Blueskin led him to the side of the road, and tethered him to a stout branch of an elder tree.

This done, he, with a quickened respiration, made his way to where the fallen rider lay—a ghastly, motionless mass.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

A MYSTERIOUS AND HORRIBLE ADVENTURE BEFALS
BLUESKIN ON HIS WAY TO LONDON.

THE horse made a strange snorting noise as Blueskin left his side, whose attention was too much engrossed by what had happened to pay any heed to it.

"He must be dead," he said; "and yet how awfully sudden! I wish I had a light now, but I must do without."

The rider's face was partly turned to the ground, so, catching hold of the collar of his coat, he pulled him over on to his back.

Enough light was shed upon the earth for him to be able to see with tolerable plainness any object not very far distant from him.

Therefore, as he knelt down near the prostrate form, he was able to see it was a man who was some distance down the vale of life.

His hair was thin and white.

The face and figure well filled out.

His attire, though plainly made, was of the very best quality of material, but there were no ornaments about him, not even a watch-chain with its pendant seals.

But what struck Blueskin most was the ghastly pallor of the countenance, which wore the marble hues of death.

The eyes were fixed and open.

There was no movement about his breast to show that he still breathed.

"He must be dead," said Blueskin. "The fall from his horse killed him. It's an ugly job, and it shouldn't have happened if I could have helped it. Still, I may as well take advantage of the circumstance. He may carry something about him which is well worth having. If he's dead he can't feel the loss, and I may as well have the things as anyone else, and a great deal better, too, I think."

Having thus taken it for granted that he was dead, Blueskin began to search his pockets with a dexterity which sufficiently attested his long practice.

But, to his astonishment, not one single thing could he find in any of the pockets.

He could scarcely believe himself, and he made a second examination, but with the same result.

"Why, some one must have been beforehand with me, and emptied his pockets! What a strange thing! No one has approached him, and—ah!"

Blueskin suddenly interrupted himself with this exclamation, and sprang to his feet.

By mere accident he had touched the face of the old man with his hand.

It was icy cold.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "not only is he dead, but he must have been dead some hours. If he had been killed by falling from his horse, his body would be warm, not cold. What am I to think of all this?"

With a greater amount of emotion than he in general manifested, Blueskin stooped again, and touched one of the hands.

That, too, was as cold as a corpse.

Then he took hold of one of the fingers, and tried to bend it.

But it was impossible. The joints were quite rigid.

A further and still closer examination showed him that the man had been dead six hours at the very least.

But nowhere about him could he find the least signs of violence.

What, however, was the most awful circumstance connected with the whole affair was that, beyond all doubt, the horse which had come by at such a furious speed had carried on his back no living rider, but a rigid corpse.

In spite of himself, Blueskin trembled at this horrible adventure. He had cried, "Stand and deliver!" on the highway to a dead man!

The behaviour of the horse was now accounted for. Some of them have the most invincible repugnance to a dead body. They can tell one from afar off, and neither blows nor caresses will induce them to approach it.

In the whole affair there was ample food for reflection and speculation of the most bewildering character.

Questions to which he would fain have been able to frame some reply, thronged quickly to his mind.

Who was this old man? What rank and position in life did he hold?

How, where, and under what circumstances, had he met with his death?

By whom had his pockets been rifled?

How came his dead body, stiff and rigid as it was, upon the back of that mysterious steed? and by what means had he retained his seat?

What, too, was his destination?

To neither of these questions could Blueskin reply.

So absorbed, too, did he become—and, when all the strange circumstances are fully considered, who can wonder at it—that he, for a time, forgot his own affairs.

He was aroused, however, by hearing the grinding of wheels, and then the blast of a horn rung out clearly on the night air.

"The Oxford coach," he cried. "I must begone. It would never do for me to be seen near this dead body, or I should have the greatest trouble in the world in removing suspicion from myself. I will draw him to the side of the road, and place him against the bank, so that he shall not run the risk of being mutilated by the wheels; and then continue my road to London."

As he spoke, Blueskin carried out his intentions.

The dead body was placed in a sitting posture against the bank on the south side of the road.

Then going to the place where he had tied his horse to trees, he undid the knot and mounted.

By the time he had done this, the lamps of the coach were plainly visible in the distance, and the guard blew another blast upon his horn.

A slight impulse was enough to cause his horse to start off at a good pace, but perceiving a town in the distance, Blueskin turned down a narrow lane which was on his left hand, and resolved to wait there until the coach had passed.

He was curious to know whether the ghastly object by the roadside would be perceived by any of its occupants, and whether they pulled up in consequence.

But no, the coach came steadily on, the rambling of the wheels reaching his ears with greater distinctness every moment.

The lane was one that had tall trees growing on either side of it. They cast a deep black shadow, for the season was scarcely far enough advanced to strip the branches of their foliage.

He took up his position just a foot or two down it, and with his face turned to the highroad.

For a moment the idea of stopping the coach, single-handed as he was, came into his head, for he muttered—

"I have had no luck in the way of money to-night, and the Oxford mail will be sure to carry a rich booty. It would be a daring feat for one man to rob so many, but I have a great mind to try. But no," he added, "it would be running too great a risk. Were I to throw away my life, who would Jack and Bess find to protect them? For their sake I will hold back; and, besides, my wound is easy, but I must not tax myself too far, and I am not certainly in a position to cope successfully with so many foes. It shall pass! I will try some safer game."

This was a prudent and sensible resolve.

The coach lumbered by.

He waited until it was out of sight and hearing, and then followed slowly, so as not to overtake it while changing horses.

"I would give no trifle to learn a little more about that horse and its dead rider. I suppose there is little chance of my ever doing so, and too many important things are pressing upon me for me to be able to devote my time to tracing it out. That it is but a small fragment of some frightful tragedy, I feel confident, and I should like to learn the other details."

Blueskin trotted gently through the little town which he had seen, but upon gaining the open country beyond, he gave his horse the reins, and swept over the ground at an amazing rate.

From a contemplation of the singular and most mysterious adventure which he had had, his thoughts reverted to those two young and persecuted beings in whose good fortunes he felt so warm an interest.

"I trust they are both in life," he said; "and yet, why should I? Jonathan would wish them dead, and he would have no scruples whatever in the matter. How tedious the road seems! Shall I never get to London?"

He urged his horse to fresh exertions, and upon breast-

ing a little hill, saw the Oxford coach again about a quarter of a mile before him.

"That coach haunts me," he said. "But I will pass it this time, and I will give them leave to overtake me."

Down the hill he went, without slackening his pace, and he was past the cumbrous conveyance like a meteor.

And now a faint, cold, gray light began to steal up from the eastern horizon before him. The dawn of a new day was at hand.

Gradually the different and more distant objects in the landscape were brought to view. The night mists rolled over the fields in huge masses, and as the sun arose, they were rapidly dispersed.

And still the horse which Blueskin had beneath him maintained its speed, and that, too, without displaying any symptoms of flagging or exhaustion. It was a matchless creature, and now that the sun shone upon him, he was able to perceive his beauties.

In colour a dark iron gray, with a small symmetrically shaped head, arching neck, and slender sinewy legs.

Blueskin was delighted with his valuable acquisition, and resolved not to distress the creature, so he tightened the reins.

About mid-day Blueskin reached Hammersmith, at that time a suburban village, and some miles distant from London.

He paused here in front of a public-house called the "Fountain," which was kept by a friend of his.

He partook of some refreshment, saw his horse attended to, and then, telling the landlord that upon no account was he to make known the circumstance of his being in the house, he went upstairs, and threw himself upon a bed.

He was much fatigued, so he determined to have a few hours' sleep till nightfall, when it was his intention to proceed to London, procure a good disguise, and then make what inquiries he could as to the whereabouts and welfare of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess.

The latter, he determined, should be restored to her rights, and he would devote the whole of his energies to the accomplishment of that purpose.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES AN INSIDIOUS PROPOSAL TO JACK SHEPPARD.

We last left Jonathan Wild at the wicket leading into the vestibule of Newgate, to which place he had repaired, in order to see in what manner Jack Sheppard had managed to escape from his cell.

He clung to the idea that some one in the prison, wishing to be revenged on him (Jonathan), had put Jack in the way of making his escape.

On being made acquainted with the actual circumstances of the case, and being shown the excavation underneath the cell door, as well as the inscription on the wall, he could scarcely conceal his admiration.

Jack Sheppard stood higher in his estimation than he had ever done. Bravery was the quality in others which he most admired.

Above all was he delighted when he learned how Jack had emptied the bucket upon them. Its contents were far from savoury, and it so happened that Mr. Noakes received the greater portion.

"Ha! ha!" said Wild. "Capital! Upon my word its good. But you don't half take a joke, Noakes. Why the devil don't you laugh? Ha! ha!"

"You be d—d," said Mr. Noakes, whose temper got the better of him.

"Never mind," said Wild. "Don't make a fuss. You will be easily able to serve him out when you put him into another dungeon. Ha! ha! I can trust you for that. Ha! ha!"

"But, I tell you he has disappeared. We can't find him anywhere. Every corner in the old prison has been searched, but all in vain."

Jonathan knew that well enough, but what he wanted to get at was the means by which he had got out.

This no one knew.

All agreed, however, that he was on the stairs and emptied the bucket on their heads as they were about to ascend.

Jonathan said not a word, but quietly mounted the stairs. He had proof positive that Jack had got out of Newgate, and that being the last place at which he was seen, he thought it would be a very strange thing if he could not discover the place at which he had made his exit.

It soon he searched all the rooms with a minuteness that seemed ridiculous, until he reached the one where the child slept.

He went to the window and looked out in the square pit-like place.

Not satisfied, he poked his head out, and, on looking to the right, there he saw the bent leaden rain pipe up which Jack had climbed.

"That's it," he said. "The fellow is as nimble as a cat. That's how he got out, you may depend."

In this conclusion he happened to be perfectly right.

He did not attempt just then to verify it, because it was by no means his wish or intention to let anyone know Jack was at that moment an inmate of one of his own cells in Little Newgate.

"What a difference it would make," he said, "if he was just to join me in my schemes, instead of setting himself up in opposition to them! Why, then I should always be successful, and with a band composed of half-a-dozen such spirits, I would dare all and defy everything. But it is not to be thought of, I fear. Still, I shall make one more attempt."

When he went down again, the governor was not visible. And as for the men on duty, they would no more have thought of asking Jonathan Wild a question than they would have thought of speaking to King George himself.

So Jonathan stalked out of Newgate, and bent his steps to his own house.

It was then getting daylight.

Just as Jonathan turned the corner of the Old Bailey, a thought darted into his head, which he evidently had a great idea of the excellence of.

"Yah! Bo!" he said. "That will do it. I shall have them both then quite safe. I wonder I did not think of that before. I shall then succeed in everything, even to bending Jack Sheppard to my wishes. I will go and see him in his cell at once."

Wild banged away at the door of his own house as he spoke, and, upon entering, took a light and went direct to the cells.

What diabolical thought was it which had now entered the politic and crafty mind of the thief-taker? Something more than usually cunning, or he would never have been so much elated.

It will be seen in the course of the events which followed what his proposition was, and what results he hoped to obtain from it if, as he expected, it was accepted.

Jack Sheppard, the reader will recollect, was left by Wild in the cell in a state of insensibility, produced by the punishment he had received and by the utter exhaustion of his system.

It was some time before he recovered himself, and then he felt very weak and ill.

The thought that Edgworth Bess had escaped from what was a thousand times worse than death afforded him some consolation, and he immediately felt himself better.

He sat up.

A dubious kind of twilight only was in the cell, and that proceeded from the oil lamp in the corridor without, a few rays from which found their way in through a small grated aperture near the top of the cell door.

"I trust," he said, "that the poor persecuted girl has by this time found a haven of safety where she will be secure from Wild's persecutions. What can be his intentions with regard to myself? Why, I wonder, did he spare my life when it would have been so easy for him to take it? It is quite at variance with his ordinary line of policy."

At this moment the tread of a heavy footstep in the passage reached his ears.

Nearer and nearer it came.

Something seemed to tell him it was Jonathan Wild.

It stopped at the cell door.

The ponderous lock was shot back, and the door permitted to swing open upon its hinges.

It was Jonathan Wild.

He stood just upon the threshold in an attitude of defence, which showed he stood in some degree of awe of his prisoner.

"Hullo!" he cried, as he turned the light of the bull's-eye lantern, which he carried into the cell, and let it rest upon Jack's face.

Jack was feeble, but he did not wish to make his enemy aware of his condition if he could possibly avoid it.

"What now?" he said, in a defiant tone of voice.

"I am glad to hear you are all right. Don't be shy with me, Jack. You are a clever fellow, and I like you."

"I am sorry I can't say the same thing."

"Are you? I didn't know you had any more regard for the truth than I have."

"Answer me one question," said Jack; "and tell the truth for once."

"What do you want to know, Jack? I am willing to forget the past and be friends again, if you are."

"Has Edgworth Bess escaped?"

"She has."

"You have not recaptured her?"

"No, thanks to you, she got clear off. I pursued her, but she had left no clue by which I could trace her footsteps."

"Then I care not, so long as she is not in your power."

"Well, Jack! Will you be friends? I have been to Newgate and heard how you served the governor, and how you got into my house I can form a pretty good guess. I don't believe there's another man breathing who could have achieved what you have achieved to-night!"

Jack felt pleased.

It was one of his failings to be fond of flattery.

To be flattered, too, by Jonathan Wild was something extraordinary.

But, it must be remembered, Jack's perceptions were not in so clear a state just then as they generally were.

"Jack," said Wild again, while his evil-looking eyes twinkled with anticipated triumph, "are you willing to forget the past, and be friends with me? Say yes, and you shall have your freedom, and if you will only serve me I will guarantee to get you out of all your difficulties! What do you say, yes or no?"

"What do you wish me to do in return?" said Jack, who, just then, would have been willing to purchase his liberty at almost any price.

"Nothing that we shall quarrel about."

"Edgworth Bess?" said Jack, inquiringly.

"We will leave her entirely out of the question. All I ask is, let me have my regulars, and assist me now and then, when I require some one clever, and we will cry quits."

"You will let me free?"

"Assuredly, if you subscribe to my terms. Are you willing to forget the past, and be friends? It will be much to the advantage of both of us to be allies and not enemies."

Jack hesitated a moment.

At length he said—

"Agreed!"

"Come on, then, Jack!" said Wild, while the twinkle in his eyes was succeeded by a hideous grin. "You are free to go where you choose. The conditions are light, and I have let you off easily. But the fact is, I was pleased with the clever manner in which you made your escape from Newgate. You climbed up a leaden pipe on to the roof, did you not?"

"I did."

"And then how did you get into my house?"

"Through the trap-door in the roof."

"Well—well, you have a rare courage, and, if you will believe me, I am glad things have turned out as they have. Act square with me, Jack, and you have nothing to fear! While we are foes we only injure each other. Be friends!"

"Agreed!" said Jack again, who, in the weak state he was in, was hardly conscious of the reality of the events which were taking place. "Agreed, if you will let me free at once."

"It shall be done as you desire, Jack, and I trust you will take it in the way I mean it."

"How?"

"As a token that I am in earnest in wishing to be friends with you. Look, here is the door."

Wilkinson, who was on the lock, seeing Wild approach, opened the door.

Jack sprang out like a dart, for he was afraid if he hesitated, Wild might alter his mind.

CHAPTER XC.

REVERTS ONCE MORE TO THE EXTRAORDINARY DISAPPEARANCE OF YOUNG WILLIAM STANSBURY.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wild, rubbing his huge hands together, and cracking his fingers. "Ha! ha! Wilkinson."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"You saw Jack Sheppard make a bolt just then?"

"I did, sir."

"Then be off after him, and don't lose sight of him, as you value your life. Don't let him see you. Off you go. Don't leave him a minute, but communicate with me as often as you can. Off at once."

"All right, Mr. Wild. I'll do it, you may depend. He's just turned down Warwick-lane."

"Make haste, then, or you will lose sight of him. Don't let him see you following him for the world."

Wilkinson, who was a very active man, darted off after Jack.

Jonathan stood upon his doorstep, and watched his progress.

Satisfaction beamed from every lineament in his face.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed again, so much pleased was he with his scheme. "I shall have her now. A capital thought, and how blindly he fell into the snare. I would stake my life he finds the girl in half the time that I should, if I set all my men to work. Let him do so. I shall then only have to learn their whereabouts from Wilkinson, and make them again my prisoners. Ha! ha! It's very good. When I get her again I will take care, too, she does not escape; and as for Jack, why he shall hang, and there will be an end of him."

Jonathan Wild closed the door, and retired into his house.

He called Tonks, and bade him take Wilkinson's place on the lock.

Then, thoroughly and perfectly satisfied with himself, Wild directed his steps to his sitting-room on the first-floor, and sitting down near the fire, poured out a large tumbler of brandy.

He wanted to think a little, and arrange the different business matters he had then in hand.

They were various.

The first in importance was the recapture of Edgworth Bess, without whom he could do nothing.

This he considered was as good as done, and was tolerably easy.

He felt quite sure Jack would not rest until he had found her.

Then there was Lord Donnull. How should he act with regard to him? Should he make him acquainted with the startling fact that the young girl was at liberty? Certainly not; there was no knowing what might be the result. He would soon have her in his power again, and he could easily conceal her absence until then.

Next came Steggs. What should he do with him? Get up a case against him and have him brought to trial, or would it be safer to put him to death in some less public manner?

That consideration he deferred. He was quite safe where he was, he thought, at all events for the present.

Then, last of all, he thought of the mysterious old man who had related such a strange story to him about the disappearance of his son with so large a sum of money in his possession. What should he do in that? Clearly it was his best policy to give it every consideration, and use every means in his power to unravel the affair. Should he succeed in finding him, he would create for himself a better reputation, and might gloss over some of his other transactions.

That, as the reader knows, was the view that he had taken of the matter at the onset, and further reflection only served to show him the benefit it would be to him.

He touched the concealed handle of the bell.

Wild was in a good temper again. Things were, he thought, going smoothly with him.

Alas! how often is it the case when we think we are most prosperous, and all things going well, that we find ourselves suddenly beset with difficulties and dangers on every side.

So it was with Wild.

To anticipate any of the surprising events which are to come would be but to destroy the interest of the narrative, so we forbear doing so.

Leves came to the door, in reply to Wild's summons.

"Pinching Tom!"

"Just come in, if you please, Mr. Wild, and he wants to see you, sir."

"Send him up."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Two minutes afterwards Pinching Tom entered, and by the expression of his face, Wild could tell that he was the bearer of intelligence of some importance.

The reader will remember that Jonathan had set him to find some traces of young Stansbury.

"I have been making inquiries unceasingly ever since I left you, Mr. Wild."

"And have they resulted in anything?"

"Only a confirmation of your suspicions, Mr. Wild."

"Sit down," said the thief-taker, graciously, "and tell me briefly what you have done."

"In obedience to your instructions, Mr. Wild, I went to the Bank of England, and verified the statement which had been made to you."

"And you found it correct?"

"In every particular. The young man was remembered by several of the bank officials, for his country-cut dress made him a conspicuous object. I found the man who had last seen him. He was one of the porters."

"And where was he last seen?"

"Going in the direction of Bishopsgate-street, Mr. Wild."

"Indeed," said Jonathan, "that looks as though I had hit upon the right nail."

"That was just what I thought, Mr. Wild."

"Ya—ah! Go on. What next?"

"I thought I would go direct to King-street."

Wild nodded.

"About halfway down, on the right-hand side of the street, I found a public-house answering to your description."

"And the sign?"

"The 'Pied Bull.'"

"Right."

"Next door, too, was the large empty house you spoke about."

"Go on. What was your next step?"

"I did not venture into the public-house, chiefly because I feared it might be the means of arousing their suspicions, so I proceeded with great caution to make my inquiries of the neighbours."

"Well?"

"Just opposite the 'Pied Bull' there is a little tailor's shop, in which a man always sits."

"I know the place."

"He was one of the persons I made inquiries of, and it was from him that I got the most definite information."

"What did he tell you?"

"He remembered seeing a young man, who agreed with the description which I gave of him, enter the 'Pied Bull' about two months ago, and what made him recollect the circumstance was, that his little child was playing in the roadway and was run over. A crowd quickly collected, and among them was this young man, who gave him five shillings to pay the doctor."

"So he recollects him?"

"Perfectly. Later in the same day he saw him enter the 'Pied Bull,' and that was the last he ever saw of him."

"And did you hear any rumours about the house, among the neighbours?"

"No, Mr. Wild, I did not. Several—in fact, I might say all of them—remember the circumstance of the child being run over, and one or two saw the 'country gentleman,' as they call him, give the five shillings to pay the doctor, but the tailor is the only one who actually saw him enter the 'Pied Bull.'"

"And is that the extent of your information?"

"Very nearly, Mr. Wild. I have no doubt we are on

the right scent now. How I got my intelligence is plain enough, but I can't make out how you got yours, Mr. Wild."

"Nor will you! Have you anything more to say?"

"Only with respect to the empty house."

"What about it?"

"I made inquiries as to how long it had stood empty, and asked for the reason why it was not occupied."

"Yes; I wanted to know that."

"The reason given was, that the landlord of the 'Pied Bull' had bought the house some years back, along with his own, when both were put up to auction. It was his intention to make the two houses into one, and make other extensive improvements, but nothing has yet been done."

"And does he give no excuse for that?"

"Well—yes. He should be obliged to wait a bit before he could do it. Trade not being over brisk, and having bought the houses, and paid the whole of the purchase-money, he had not enough to make the alterations he desired, but that he should do so as soon as he had an opportunity."

"And so the people had no suspicions?"

"None; and the place had been so long in its present condition that they almost forgot it had ever been otherwise."

"And what do you make of the affair, Tom?"

"Well, Mr. Wild, I hardly know, but I think a good many things go on at the 'Pied Bull' as hadn't ought to."

"Right; and it is not the only one of the sort in London, to my knowledge. However, Tom, I want this affair thoroughly sifted, and if all turn out as I fully expect it will, it will turn out a good thing for me, and I won't forget you. Above all, be careful, because I should be defeated if any hint of my intentions got wind."

"Trust me, Mr. Wild."

"And now, Tom, listen. Take yourself where you like during the day, but come to me to-night at about twelve o'clock. Provide yourself with a lantern and spade, and we will pay a visit to the 'Pied Bull.'"

"Very good, Mr. Wild," said Pinching Tom, as he rose to go.

"We shall make some discoveries, I doubt not."

"Sh—shall we go alone?"

"Not altogether, so you need not be afraid. I shall take care to have some men stationed within hearing."

With this assurance Pinching Tom was tolerably content, and he withdrew.

Jonathan Wild finished his brandy, and then went down into the office to transact business.

But with the details of that the reader would not care to be made acquainted, since in them there was nothing of any special interest.

During the day several members of his band brought him messages from Wilkinson, but the intelligence he wanted and expected did not come to hand.

And so we pass over the time until nightfall, when Pinching Tom and Jonathan set out on their adventurous expedition.

CHAPTER XCI.

JONATHAN WILD AND PINCHING TOM MAKE AN ENTRANCE INTO THE WALLED-UP CELLAR.

LONDON, in the earlier part of the last century, was indeed a fearful place.

It was the resort of the most desperate characters that existed, and outrages at which we should shudder with horror were then nightly perpetrated.

Above all, there existed frightful dens into which strangers and travellers were decoyed, and from whence they never came forth again.

At that period, too, the difficulty which surgeons had in finding subjects for dissection led to the establishment of a class of ruffians who, at a later date, were known by the expressive name of "resurrection men."

The frightful deeds which these men committed have frequently furnished subject-matter for the novelist, but no one has yet dared to portray the more awful and disgusting side of their character.

The reason of this is obvious.

We will give it in the words of a highly-talented and

well-known author, whose untimely end all lovers of literature must deplore.

He says:—

"There are certain themes the interest of which is all-absorbing, but which are too entirely horrible for the purposes of legitimate fiction. These the mere romancist must eschew if he does not wish to offend or to disgust."

And so, although we are in possession of many facts relative to the "mysteries of London," yet we shall forbear giving them for the reasons so well and ably expressed in the preceding paragraph.

But we shall certainly follow Jonathan Wild upon his night excursion to the "Pied Bull," for the circumstances are full of interest.

It was about half an hour after midnight that two dusky-looking forms paused opposite the public-house in question.

In a few minutes they were joined by two more, and then by two again, until presently about a dozen had assembled.

They were Jonathan Wild and his men.

The street was in total darkness.

They stood under the shadow of the tailor's house, in a dense and dusky throng.

In a low voice, Jonathan, without telling them his object, gave his men instructions where to place themselves, and how to act when they heard him blow his whistle shrilly.

One by one they departed, and took up their different stations, leaving Jonathan Wild and Pinching Tom alone.

The latter, in obedience to his instructions, had provided himself with a lantern and spade. He had also added, on his own responsibility, a mattock and crowbar, in case any necessity should arise for their use.

All the houses in the street were in total darkness, the "Pied Bull" not excepted.

"How shall we make an entrance, Mr. Wild?" asked Pinching Tom. "I took a good look at the premises yesterday. The lower windows and the door are boarded over."

"We can get over that difficulty."

"As how, Mr. Wild?"

"The boards will be easily removed."

"But there is a court which takes you to the back of the premises, which, I should think, would not be so well guarded."

"The front will be the best," said Jonathan. "They do not anticipate any attack, and ten to one if they have taken any precautions to prevent a determined man making an entrance. Have you a jemmy?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild. Here's one, if you please, sir. Thinking it might be wanted, I slipped it into my pocket."

Wild took the crowbar, and having made a hasty examination of the windows, set to work upon one of them.

A slight cracking noise now broke the silence, but only for a moment.

Jonathan had one of the boards off.

"The lantern, Tom," he said, "quick."

Pinching Tom unmasked a dark lantern, which enabled Wild to see that, if he removed another board, he would have no difficulty in making an entrance, for the glass in the windows beyond had disappeared, and he could see quite into the room.

The other board was, like its companion, quickly torn from its position.

All was now ready for them to enter, but before he did so Jonathan whistled faintly.

It was a signal, and was obeyed by a man gliding out of the shadow of the buildings, and coming to his side.

"We are going to enter here," said Jonathan, to the new comer. "You remain here on guard. If anything unusual should happen you know how to summon me."

"All right, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan and his satellite now scrambled through the window, into the front room of the empty house.

"Put up the boards in the same places," said Wild, as soon as they were inside, "but do it so that they can be pulled down in a moment."

Pinching Tom was a brave enough man, but he could not control an apprehensive shudder when he found himself fairly beneath the roof of the house of which he had such ghastly and horrible suspicions.

He was ashamed, though, to hang back.

Wild took the lantern, and unmasked it a little way, so

that, although it afforded them sufficient light to enable them to see their route, yet enough light did not escape to make any one aware that persons were in the house.

The room was quite destitute of furniture.

Upon reaching the door they found it locked.

That, however, was a matter of little moment.

Pinching Tom was wont to boast that no lock could be made that he was unable to unpick, and as the lock on this door was only one of a very ordinary kind, he had the bolt back as easily and as quickly as if he had possessed the proper key.

On passing through this door they emerged into a little hall or passage, from which a flight of stairs ascended.

Wild looked all about him with great care, for having closed the door of the front room again, he was not afraid of the rays of light from his lantern being seen.

But there was nothing to excite suspicion, nor were there any indications of any one having lately visited.

Jonathan looked vexed.

The hypothesis which he had formed had this empty house for its basis.

He reflected a moment or so, and then he said—

"Where are the cellar steps, Tom?"

"Not far from this 'ere staircase, I should say, Mr. Wild; yes, here you are, sir—a little door in the wood-work!"

"Open it, then, and see where it leads to."

"Its fastened, Mr. Wild, but I daresay I shall soon get it undone."

Tom applied his crowbar to the crevice of the door.

It resisted for some time, having evidently been *securely fastened from within*.

Jonathan breathed again.

More pressure was applied to the crowbar, but Wild grew impatient, so he seized the edge of the door with his fingers, and, putting forth all his strength, fairly dragged it down.

The opening disclosed a flight of steep brick steps, upon which the dust lay in incredible quantities.

Pinching Tom, at the sight of this dismal and grave-like looking place, fairly drew back.

It did not appear that Jonathan observed this movement, or, if he did, did not attribute it to its right cause, for, taking no notice of it, he began to descend the steps.

Seeing his leader go first gave Tom a little more courage; besides which, he did not dare for the life of him hold back. His master—for such in every sense of the word he was—was treating him with great consideration, and visions of being appointed lieutenant in Blueskin's place flitted through his brain.

The cellar steps were only twelve in number, so the bottom was soon reached.

The cellar was on the right hand.

Jonathan entered it eagerly. He felt a more than common interest in the affair, and he was consequently exceedingly anxious to know whether it would terminate according to his expectations.

The cellar, which was clearly under the front part of the house, was an ordinary vaulted chamber, quite empty, and bearing every appearance of having been so for some time.

The walls, floor, and ceiling were all covered thickly with dust, while spiders had spun their webs in every direction.

Wild was foiled.

There was nothing at all there.

Still, the information he had received had prepared him for quite a different result, and he was far from thinking now that it was incorrect.

He must have had some doubts about it, however, or he would not have taken so much trouble to assure himself that there was no mistake.

"There don't seem to be nothing here, Mr. Wild," said Pinching Tom, as Jonathan finished a minute investigation of the cellar.

"Not what we want," growled the thief-taker; "but I haven't done yet."

As he poked, he left the cellar, and then proceeded to examine the walls at the foot of the stairs.

"Ha!" he said. "This explains it. Look at this brickwork, Tom. Don't it seem to you to be newer than that. Besides, here is a kind of arch at the top, just like the entrance to the other cellar."

"This is a doorway been bricked up," said Tom; "there can't be no mistake about that. Oh! it is as plain as can be."

"Go to work, then."

"On this wall?"

"Yes; you must fetch it down somehow or other, and don't make any more noise than you can help. It will be easy enough after you get the first brick out."

"Its lucky I brought this, then," said Tom, as he pulled the mattock out of his pocket. This will soon do the business."

He soon found, when he began to work, that the mortar was soft, which materially lessened the difficulty of the task.

He nevertheless found it tedious, even with the help that Jonathan gave him. The wall was three bricks in thickness, and every one had to be pulled out separate, and laid down carefully, for they were, above all, careful not to make noise enough to rouse the people in the next house.

All things, however, must have an end, and so, after about twenty minutes or half-an-hour's work, a breach in the wall was made, large enough to allow them to crawl through.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE BODY OF WILLIAM STANSBURY IS FOUND BENEATH THE FLOORING OF THE CELLAR.

JONATHAN went first.

Pinching Tom followed, and held the lantern high above his head.

It was in a vaulted apartment, in no way differing from that under the front of the house, that they now found themselves.

In one end, however, was a door, which, from its position, seemed to indicate a means of communication between that house and the "Pied Bull."

The floor, too, was very different—unlike the other cellar, there was no dust or dirt upon the floor to speak of.

It was composed of small flag-stones.

At these Jonathan Wild looked narrowly, and every now and then pressed upon the mortar with his thumb-nail, in order to judge, by the hardness exhibited, how long it had remained there.

Pinching Tom held the light, and watched him with the greatest interest.

Presently Wild gave vent to an ejaculation.

"Here is what we seek," he cried, springing to his feet. "Put the lantern down on the floor, and get your tools. Now then."

"Where am I to begin, Mr. Wild?"

"Here, and then work your way round the stone. When the mortar is all loosened, we shall easily be able to lift the stone from its setting."

"We shall, sir; and it won't take very long to loosen the mortar."

Both set to work with the blades of their clasp-knives, as being the most convenient instruments, and very soon indeed—in much less time, in fact, than one would have expected, they had the whole of the mortar dug out of the interstices.

The end of the crowbar was then inserted at one of the corners, and after one or two trials, they succeeded in raising the stone up a little way.

The advantage was taken of it to turn it quite over.

Some blackish-looking earth was disclosed by the stone.

Pinching Tom took up the spade with the intention of removing some of it, but Jonathan took the implement from him, and with nervous impatience began to scrape away the mould.

This he did to a depth of not more than two inches, when his spade struck against some object harder than the soil itself.

He laid this object bare.

It was the lower portion of a human body.

"And do you think this is the young man you spoke of, Mr. Wild?"

"I have very little doubt of it. Help me raise these other stones, and then we shall be able to see his face."

Now that one flag was taken out, there was no difficulty in displacing the remainder, and Pinching Tom laid them over in a few moments.

All that now remained was to remove the mould from the surface of the body.

This Pinching Tom did, while Wild folded his arms and looked on.

At length the corpse was fully exposed to view.

It was that of a young man, whose appearance in life must have been tolerably prepossessing, though now, of course, its effect was marred, for decomposition had already made some progress.

And now we may as well take the opportunity of explaining what may seem strange in Wild's behaviour on this occasion, for it is no part of our plan to wish to maintain unnecessary mysteries.

In brief, then, about a month before the commencement of our story, Jonathan received an anonymous communication to the effect that if he would look in a certain place in a certain house he would there find the evidence of a diabolical murder which had just been committed, and which was only one of a long series of similar crimes.

But it so happened that other things turned up to prevent him from attending to this note, and then, as the reader is aware, since he made Jack's acquaintance, that individual found him plenty to do.

Indeed, the circumstance was utterly forgotten until the old man strangely enough called upon him, as we have related, and then he all at once recollected the anonymous letter he had received, and thought that probably enough the victim there spoken of might be William Stansbury.

The house referred to was the "Pied Bull," and the reader is already aware how he called Pinching Tom aside and gave him his instructions.

The result, too, has been seen, so that the contents of the letter were completely verified.

The only link wanted was the proof that the dead body which they discovered was that of the young farmer.

Morally, however, there could be little doubt of it, and, so far as Wild and his janizary could tell, the corpse agreed with the description the old man had given of his son.

Having found the body, Jonathan's course was now clear and straightforward enough, and he would have sufficient grounds for arresting the occupants of the public-house.

He could yet see that the affair would redound very much to his credit, since he would undoubtedly be the means of breaking up one of those horrible dens into which unsuspecting travellers were decoyed and murdered.

"So far all is satisfactory," said Jonathan, after a brief interval of silence. "All has turned out exactly as I wished and anticipated. Whether this is, or is not, the body of William Stansbury, matters little, though of the two I would rather that it were."

"There is that door, Mr. Wild," said Pinching Tom.

"I don't know what more you think of doing."

"It is merely a communication between the two houses—at least, so I have been informed. We may as well see. It will not take much longer."

The pair upon this advanced to the door, and easily opened it.

They had to pull it towards them to pass through.

On the other side was merely an ordinary public-house cellar.

"All right," said Wild, "close the door. It will be best to secure it in some way."

"The door opens inwards, so it ought to be done easily enough," said Pinching Tom.

"There are the flag-stones we have taken up. I will help you place them against the door, so that if any one tries to seek an entrance here they will find it rather a difficult matter."

Between them they moved the stones and piled them up against the door, in such a manner that it was next to an impossibility for any one from the public-house to push it open.

This being done, Jonathan had things left just as they then were, and retraced his steps.

The man outside was waiting for them.

On reaching the street, Wild again summoned his men around him, and gave them orders to keep careful watch during the remainder of the night until he came in the morning.

Jonathan determined that he would make as much

display of his zeal as he could; so at an early hour he waited upon the Secretary of State, told him the whole affair, and obtained his sanction to act in the way he thought best.

Thus armed, the thief-taker collected all the police-officers he could, and placing himself at their head, marched with them in a body to the house.

His men reported that no one had left the house.

The arrival of Wild and the officers raised quite a commotion.

The public-house was open,

Jonathan entered boldly at the head of all the rest.

A hard-featured woman was standing at the bar-counter, and as soon as she saw the officers, she turned of an ashy whiteness.

"Arrest that woman," cried Wild, "and every one else you find in the house."

The officers quickly spread themselves over the building.

Two servants were found and taken prisoners, and they seemed, with the landlady, to be the sole occupiers of the house.

Being quite assured that there was no one else, and, moreover, being assured by the neighbours that there was no landlord, Jonathan had the doors all fastened up, and he walked back with his prisoners in triumph.

The body was removed from the cellar, and was recognised by Mr. Stansbury as being his son. Over his grief we draw a veil.

The whole affair made a great stir when it was made public, and Jonathan Wild came in for a large share of undeserved commendation, and it is certain that he was just then more popular than he was at any other portion of his career.

The landlady of the "Pied Bull," who was a widow, was duly brought to trial, condemned, and executed at Tyburn. Her two servants, who were found accessories, shared the same fate.

And so was broken up one of about the worst of all the dens that then existed in London, and in to the disgusting and horrifying details of which we do not choose to go, for the reasons before given.

It was now that Jonathan thought more seriously than ever of quitting his profession as thief-taker, and, by a marriage with Edgworth Bess, obtaining undivided possession of the Donnull estates.

How he fared will be quickly seen, but we fear that he has engrossed our attention for a considerable period, and think it high time that we turned to some of the other characters in our history, all of whom, strange to say, are separated from each other.

It will be a relief, too, if we can turn to some more pleasing scene than the one to which we have just been introduced, and which would never have been touched upon at all had not the exigencies of the narrative required.

Blueskin we last left at the public-house at Hammer-smith.

Jack Sheppard we have not seen since he so blindly fell into the snare which Wild had laid for him, and dashed out of his house and round the corner of Warwick-lane, with Wilkinson at his heels.

To neither of these can we now turn our attention, for we are obliged to lay before the reader some of the most startling incidents that it is possible to conceive.

CHAPTER XCIII.

FOLLOWS THE FORTUNES OF EDGWORTH BESS, AND
RELATES WHAT HAPPENED TO HER AFTER SHE
ESCAPED FROM WILD'S CELLS.

THERE is one of the characters in this history in whom, it is hoped, a more than common interest is felt, but of whom we have for some length of time lost sight.

We allude, of course, to Edgworth Bess, whose trials, sufferings, privations, and ill-fortune, borne, as they were, with such a meek and gentle spirit, ought to have endeared her to all our hearts.

But the busy whirl of exciting incidents which have, from almost the first line, kept our attention wholly occupied, have afforded scarcely any opportunities for her gentle woman's nature to develop itself.

For this, however, there is yet ample time.

When, in obedience to the earnest entreaties of Jack, she left the cell, and rushed along the passage as he

had told her, she was suffering acutely from the effects of Wild's brutal usage, and more than once she felt as though she must have fallen to the earth.

But, by a strong effort of the mind, she kept herself up, and, only partially conscious of the route she took, and the different objects she passed, she presently found herself in the yard at the back of Wild's house.

From that place, as the reader already knows, a dark passage led into old Newgate-market.

Down this she ran, with all the speed she could make, but when she reached it, the horrible stench which filled the place almost overpowered her.

She leant against the wall at the end of the passage for support.

While she did so, her quick ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

The fear that it might be her much-dreaded enemy, who, after vanquishing, perhaps murdering, Jack, had started in pursuit of her, bereft her, for a moment, of all motion, and then, feeling it would be madness to fly, she shrunk back behind a massive pillar.

The footstep came nearer.

She scarcely dared to breathe.

In another moment her worst forebodings were realized. Jonathan Wild emerged from the passage.

The outlines of his bulky form were only just distinguishable from the surrounding gloom.

But if she had any doubt as to his identity, it was dispelled completely when she heard his voice.

There was no mistaking those harsh, grating sounds.

In a state of the greatest conceivable agitation she listened to his footsteps, as he threaded his way through the intricacies of the market to the entrance in Warwick-lane.

She had fortunately sufficient presence of mind to remain where she was.

And yet, if the truth was known, it was more likely from fear than calculation, that she acted as she did.

Scarcely venturing to draw her breath, lest the faint sound should reach her enemies' ears, she still remained crouched up behind the pillar.

And well was it for her that she did so, for, as the reader knows, Jonathan Wild came back.

But he did not look about him. Strange to say, the idea that she might be hiding somewhere in the market never entered his mind. He made sure her first act would be to place as great a distance as she possibly could between herself and his house.

Jonathan re-entered the passage.

With an intentness, of which no words could possibly convey an adequate idea, she listened to the sound of his returning footsteps.

In that silent place she heard a heavy door swung shut, and the creaking of rusty bolts as they were shot into their sockets.

But even now the fear that he might come back again made her loath to quit her hiding-place.

So minute after minute passed away, and yet she stirred not.

But the silence of the dark and miserable place still continued, and she took fresh heart.

Cautiously, and trembling in every limb, she crept from behind a pillar, listened, and then took her way at random; all she did was to choose the widest route.

Presently, although she reached it circuitously, she emerged into Warwick-lane, and stood as near as possible upon the same spot as Jonathan had.

She looked up and down the dismal and deserted thoroughfare with an aching heart.

Which way to run for safety, or where to look for a friend, she knew not.

And as the full wretchedness of her position forced itself upon her she sobbed aloud.

A fugitive from the much-dreaded Jonathan Wild.

Alone and unprotected.

Destitute of all means.

Could anyone be in a more forlorn situation than she was.

To remain where she was, however, was but to needlessly court danger, and yet she could scarcely find heart to move away.

At that very moment was not Jack a prisoner in Wild's power for her sake; perhaps, by this time, was murdered.

Fresh tears streamed from her eyes as she made this reflection.



[JACK SHEPPARD IS ONE TOO MANY FOR WILKINSON.]

Over and over again did she regret that she had suffered herself to be persuaded by him to leave the place. But regrets came too late, and were unavailing now.

"What shall I do?" she cried, in anguished tones. "What shall I do? What will become of me?"

It was some moments before she found an answer to this question, and then she thought of Johnson, the landlord of the "Black Lion," in Drury-lane.

"I will go to him," she said. "I will go to him, and tell him how truly wretched I am—surely he will befriend me! I will try, and ask him to assist me in Blueskin's name."

Having thus resolved upon a particular course of action, she grew calmer, and, drawing her torn and disordered dress as closely about her person as she could, directed her steps down Warwick-lane to Ludgate-hill, and thence to Drury-lane.

In those days, when so little public order was maintained, it was a perilous journey for a young girl to make at that lonely hour.

But Edgworth Bess, thinking nothing of her danger, hastened on.

The corner of the turning now known as Farringdon-street, but then as Fleet-market, was reached in the course of a few minutes.

Here she paused, and drew back in terror, for a wild, uproarious bacchanalian shout arose, which echoed and re-echoed through the silent streets.

By the fullness of its sound it must have come from many a lusty throat.

Mingled with it, too, was the occasional clash of weapons, or a burst of drunken laughter.

It was but the surprise of the moment that made Edgworth Bess draw back. Recovering herself, she continued on her way.

But ere she could reach the opposite corner, there was a sudden rush of many footsteps from the direction of Fleet-market, accompanied by a strange whooping cry.

A deadly sensation of sickness came over the young

girl's heart as she heard it, and she almost sank to the ground.

To the full was she conscious of the peril in which she stood, and that knowledge endowed her with strength to make a sudden rush to escape.

"Hurrah!" cried the chorus of voices. "Hurrah! More sport to-night! Hurrah for the brave Mohawks! Hunt her down! On—on, brave hearts! Rare sport—rare sport! Hurrah! hurrah! There she goes, along Fleet-street! Tally-ho! Keep her in sight! Hurrah! hurrah!"

Such were the loudest of the cries that made themselves heard above other and minor sounds.

Such were the cries that filled poor Edgworth Bess with the utmost alarm, and made her fly along the street with the speed of a hunted hare.

Imminent, indeed, was her danger, and greater, perhaps, than ever she had known.

By the dim light in the streets, the outlines of the throng who had uttered such strange cries and then rushed off in chase of her, could be partially distinguished.

In number they were, perhaps, rather over twenty.

The shape of their garments told at once they were persons of high social rank.

All were armed with long glittering dress swords or rapiers, which they either held aloft in the air, or whirled round their heads as they dashed onwards.

This band of wild young men were at the times of which we write the terror of all persons who were compelled to be abroad after dark.

By their barbarous acts and uncivilized behaviour they had earned for themselves the appellation of Mohawks—the collective name for one of the most bloodthirsty tribes of the North American Indians.

The Mohawks—or as the word is sometimes written, Mohocks—were composed of a number of dissolute young men, of ages varying from eighteen to thirty years. Among them might be found noblemen's sons, officers of rank, and a goodly sprinkling of those individuals whose income and mode of existence are profound mysteries to their most intimate acquaintance.

In a general way, the evening would be spent in furious revelry, or the amusements of the gaming table: then, when the sober portion of the inhabitants of the metropolis had retired to rest, they would sally forth into the streets, and setting the authorities at defiance, commit all kinds of excesses.

On these occasions they all seemed to be animated by one impulse, and that was to strive to outdo each other in deeds of violence and barbaric cruelty.

Wherever they went they left a track behind them which could be followed without difficulty.

Watchmen were knocked down, or otherwise maltreated—windows broken—signs pulled down—vessels on the river cut from their moorings, and sent adrift into the stream—carriages stopped, and their occupants subjected to every imaginable indignity—in fine, there was no species of enormity, no deed of violence or cruelty that they left uncommitted.

Many a time would the peaceful inhabitants of the city be rudely startled from their slumbers by their demoniac war-whoop, and experience a feeling of deep thankfulness that they were not abroad and in their path.

In all London there was not a human being to whom they were unknown, by name at least, and Edgworth Bess was no exception to the rule.

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE MOHAWKS CHASE EDGWORTH BESS THROUGH FLEET-STREET AND THE STRAND.

MANY and many a time had she trembled with dread when their fiendish deeds had been related to her, many and many a time had she hoped that she should never be exposed to their brutality.

Mercy, she knew, was a word to which they never paid any attention, and that to implore it would be but to court their utmost malice and derisive laughter.

To hunt a poor helpless girl through the streets would afford them unbounded satisfaction and delight.

Instances are yet on record of their having performed worse deeds than this. In particular one where, having

procured a large barrel, they studded the inside with iron spikes, and a poor woman happening to fall into their clutches, they put her inside it, nailed in the top, and rolled it along the streets.

This will be sufficient to show that our heroine had good grounds for apprehension.

But the dread she felt at falling into their power enabled her to make the most incredible exertions.

With many a yell and unnatural cry, the Mohawks dashed on in pursuit of the flying form which they could just distinguish before them in the darkness.

There were no vehicles and no passengers in the street to impede their progress. The hour was the one before day begins, and when London is like a city of the dead.

As she sped along the corner of Fetter-lane she caught a transient glimpse of the lantern in the watchman's box that was stationed at the corner, but she did not pause or apply to him for protection; she was well aware it would be utterly useless.

By some unaccountable perverseness, those who were chosen to be guardians of the night and preservers of the peace were invariably old men, who were equally incapable of following any occupation, or of defending themselves or protecting others.

Edgworth Bess, then, continued on her way, believing that her only hope of escape consisted in so doing.

And in this she was quite correct, for the watchman, hearing the uproar, had very prudently ensconced himself in the recesses of his box, and pretended to be very sound asleep.

By so doing he hoped to escape the observation of the much-dreaded Mohawks.

But he was mistaken.

The sight of the lantern which was hanging outside diverted their attention for a moment from its original object.

Watchmen were peculiarly their prey.

Clashing their swords, and uttering their war-whoop, they made a simultaneous dash at this one.

The box went over in a moment with a terrible crash. It fell face downwards on the pavement, thus bringing the watchman beneath it.

A smothered sort of howl reached their ears.

They responded to it with a triumphant shout.

This was called "coffining a watchman," and was considered very fine sport indeed.

The whole proceeding occupied scarcely a moment of time.

"Now for the girl!" cried one of the foremost. "Quick, or she will elude us!"

"Yes—yes! The girl—the girl!" exclaimed the rest, as they bounded with fresh energy after the breathless creature.

What to do she knew not. There was a vague notion in her mind that she might run the whole distance to Drury-lane, and succeed in keeping ahead of her pursuers.

But as yet she had gone only a little more than half the distance, and already she felt her respiration impeded, and her limbs scarce able to maintain her weight.

Terror, however, acted as a sharp spur to urge her on, and although she felt as though each moment was going to be her last, she flew forwards with undiminished speed.

The loud cries, trampling feet, and clashing weapons of her pursuers seemed, nevertheless, to grow nearer and nearer, and more alarmingly distinct.

Her eyes grew dim.

Her brain reeled.

She staggered more than once, but each time was fortunate enough to keep her footing.

But she felt her senses were leaving her—that it would be beyond all possibility for her to hold up much longer.

Temple-bar was passed.

Then she saw, looming before her in the darkness, the dim outlines of St. Clement's Church.

It was just at this moment a more than usually loud shout of gratification was uttered by the Mohawks, as they perceived how quickly they were gaining upon the object of their pursuit, and who it would have been more consonant to human nature for them to defend instead of persecute.

But it was by no means part of their plan to come up with her too soon, and so they slackened speed a little. What they wished was to keep her well in view, and

make her run until she could run no longer. The hunt over, their pleasure would be at an end.

Poor Bess reached the stout iron palings which surround the church.

Go further she could not.

Uttering a cry of despair and horror, she clung convulsively to the ironwork.

The strength which had up to that instant animated her seemed to suddenly depart, and she sank down in a strange, huddled-up mass upon the stone pavement.

She was only partially in possession of her faculties, but her hands retained their grasp upon the palisades.

A film came over her eyes, and objects faded from her sight.

With an earnest hope that Jack or Blueskin might arrive even at the eleventh hour and save her, as they had already done upon more than one occasion, she strove to rally her departing senses.

Then with a triumphant yell, and a sudden rush, the Mohawks closed around her.

She saw their numerous forms; to her excited fancy they were those of demons.

She saw the glimmer of their polished weapons in the murky light.

Then she screamed faintly, as she saw them all pointed towards herself.

To have moved now without receiving a ghastly wound from one of the many glittering steel points that surrounded her would have been an impossibility.

A mocking laugh arose from the shadowy throng of Mohawks as they beheld her frantic terror.

"Mohawks!" they cried, with one voice, and in such lusty tones, that they made the whole place ring again.

"Mohawks! Hurrah for the Mohawks of London! Hurrah! hurrah! Up, wench! What brings you abroad at such an hour?"

The last words were spoken by one who pressed more closely than the others to the trembling form of the poor girl.

"Why, boys," he said, "she is young, and, as well as I can tell in the dark, has a pretty face."

This speech produced a general movement among the rest. Lowering their swords, they crowded round her, all eager to catch a glimpse of her countenance.

"Mercy! have mercy upon me!" moaned Bess, faintly; "let me go, gentlemen, I implore you! Mercy, mercy! Help! help!"

It would seem as though her prayer had touched their hearts, and that they were about to accede to it, for they drew back a pace or two.

Making a great and almost superhuman effort, Edgworth Bess struggled to her feet.

She brushed her long, black, waving hair away from her face, then, clasping her hands beseechingly, gazed upon the spectral-like forms around her.

"Let me go," she said, "pray let me go! Have mercy on me, gentlemen, have mercy! I am only a poor, friendless girl, so you ought to feel some compassion for my state. Pray, let me go!"

But no heed was paid to what she said. One and all were occupied in gazing upon her, for they could not fail to perceive the beauty of her face and form.

Poor Bess turned her eyes from one to another, but there was not a single countenance whose expression gave her room to hope.

In one part of the ring, however, she saw a small opening, and in obedience to the powerful impulse to escape, she made a sudden and unexpected rush in that direction, and strove to get through.

So rapidly was the action performed that she almost succeeded in her design.

In fact, she did get through.

But she was bewildered, and consequently unable to take as much advantage of her success as she might have done.

With the greatest apparent ease, one of the band of Mohawks, who was tall and lithe of limb, sprang past her.

Then, turning round suddenly in advance of her, he held out his sword before him, thus effectually arresting her further progress.

Another moment, and the troop of young men, who were scars upon the face of humanity, stood around her. Shoulder to shoulder, in one unbroken circle they stood.

Each held his polished rapier in his grasp in such a manner that as they stood and projected the weapons before them, the points formed a ring about eighteen inches in diameter.

The extreme points of the swords were actually in contact with each other.

In the centre, and half-dead with terror, yet not daring to move in the least degree, stood poor, persecuted Edgworth Bess.

Upon the faces of each one of her tormentors was a fiend-like smile.

But they were more silent now.

For full two minutes did she remain in this horrible position, and then one spoke.

"More sport," he said, "more sport! Prick her with the swords! That's it! Look! Bravo! Capital! capital!"

As he spoke, this brute in human form lunged slightly with his sword.

A scream of agony came from the girl's lips as she felt the steel enter the skin, though it did not go deep enough to inflict a serious wound.

"Hurrah!" cried the rest, as they followed the example of their companion.

CHAPTER XCV.

BLUESKIN MEDITATES A DESPERATE UNDERTAKING, WHICH HAS NOTHING BUT BOLDNESS TO RECOMMEND IT.

FATIGUE procured Blueskin several hours' sound sleep, despite the deep anxiety of his mind.

This circumstance was fortunate, for unless he thoroughly recruited himself, what chance would he have with so powerful an enemy as Jonathan Wild?

The latter part of the day, however—that is to say, from noon till dark—seemed to pass with great slowness, for he deemed it injudicious to show himself by daylight.

Jonathan Wild was under the impression that he was no more, and things might so turn out as to make it advisable for him to continue so.

In obedience to his wishes, the landlord had started off to London to purchase him a disguise, and with the aid of which Blake trusted to keep Wild in ignorance of his existence, while, at the same time, he should be able to make inquiries as to the fate of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess.

At about eight o'clock, however, by which time it was quite dark, being fully equipped, he had his horse saddled and brought round to the front door of the inn.

Not his most intimate acquaintance would have recognised him as he mounted.

Yet he did not carry with him an appearance of being disguised. On the contrary, any one would have taken it to be his natural character.

His ordinary attire had been exchanged for one that suited his tall and well-built form most admirably.

It was one best calculated to show off the proportions of the human frame, and in its style about as picturesque as could be well imagined.

To-day such a costume would attract a very great deal of notice, but then, when greater latitude was allowed in dress, it was thought nothing of, though many of the fairer sex might have been induced to look twice at its wearer.

A few lines will serve to give the reader an idea of it.

We will begin with his head, upon which he wore a light flaxen peruke, very tastefully arranged, and terminating in a *queue*, or tail, which hung down on to his back, and was secured at the extremity by a bow of black silk ribbon.

This was surmounted by a black felt hat, turned up at the brim, and edged with a narrow border of gold lace.

His coat, which was of marone-coloured velvet, fitted closely to his form, and was likewise trimmed with gold lace, but of a wider description and more elaborate pattern than that round the rim of his hat.

The sleeves at the upper part near the shoulders fitted tightly, but they gradually widened to the wrist, where they were turned back, so as to form a cuff, which was so deep as almost to reach the elbow.

Below these cuffs were some spotlessly white lace ruffles, which, when the hand was held downwards, fell over and concealed even the tips of the fingers.

Then the waistcoat which was almost as large as coats are now-a-days, was of bright amber-coloured satin, and came quite over the hips.

It was buttoned closely from the top—just allowing a white lace neckcloth to be visible—until within about four buttons from the bottom. The edges were very prettily embroidered with black silk, and had an appearance of great richness.

Then below the waistcoat appeared small clothes of white leather, similar to those worn by the Horse Guards at the present day. His highly-polished riding-boots, too, were like theirs, except that they did not come quite so high up above the knee.

A richly-mounted sword, with a glittering hilt, completed his costume.

If the foregoing description conveys a clear idea to the reader's mind, he will not fail to perceive that his exterior was aristocratic and imposing to a degree. He would, in fact, be taken for one of those young bloods who haunted the fashionable quarter of the metropolis.

Blueskin was an accomplished rider, and the manner in which he mounted and fixed himself firmly in the seat, would have been sufficient to convince any one of it.

In this position, too, he was seen to the greatest advantage, and the landlord gazed upon him admiringly.

His horse was well rested, and obeyed the impulse forward which he gave it with the utmost willingness.

There is one thing we almost forgot to mention, and that is the peculiar appearance of his countenance, which would have enabled any one who had once seen him to recognise him.

But Blake himself had not forgotten it. At his request the landlord had brought him a box of cosmetic preparation, with which he had covered his face, and obliterated all traces of the dusky blue tinge which it wore.

So artfully, too, and cleverly was this done, that except upon a very close inspection, it could not possibly be perceived.

Recognition, he felt sure, provided he took ordinary care would be impossible.

And certainly no disguise could be better calculated to deceive Jonathan Wild. Supposing he should find his body had disappeared from the turret-chamber, or learned in any way that his life had been preserved, he would never think of looking for his old associate wearing such a garb.

The only thing he would have to do would be to keep up the character.

The distance to London was but short, and consequently soon performed; but he was careful to go at an easy rate, because by so doing he would be less likely to attract notice.

It gave him the opportunity to think over the best plan to be pursued to gain his ends.

A thousand half-formed schemes flitted before his imagination, yet he could not find one tangible, or that carried with it any reasonable prospect of success.

Jonathan Wild was a difficult man to deal with, and no one was much better acquainted with that fact than he was himself.

He rode as far as the "Saracen's Head," in Skinner-street, without coming to any definite arrangement. To be sure, one scheme haunted his mind more than any other, but it was one that required an inordinate amount of boldness to carry out.

And yet it might, perhaps, stand all the better chance on that very account; for to attempt to foil Wild by over-reaching him in cunning would be simply ridiculous.

The ostler, perceiving Blueskin's very distinguished appearance, received him with the utmost obsequiousness.

Then, having given the man some particular instructions, Blake strolled up Skinner-street, and passed the Old Bailey to Jonathan Wild's house.

It was on the opposite side of the street that he walked. He was thus enabled to get a good view of it.

As usual, no light could be perceived at any one of the windows of the thief-taker's dwelling. To have seen it, one would have thought it uninhabited.

No one appeared to be observing him, but still Blake did not know what unknown eye might be upon him. so he sauntered slowly by the house, and apparently taking no more notice of that one than he did of its neighbours.

And lest even his turning back too soon should pro-

voke suspicion, he walked right on to the corner of St. Martin's-le-Grand.

He paused here listlessly for a moment, and then retraced his steps.

But his caution was superfluous. The hour was an early one, but still very few people indeed were abroad.

In fact, as we have more than once stated in the course of this narrative, nothing but the most urgent necessity would take anyone into the streets after the lamps were lighted, which was the signal for all manner of depredations to begin.

At a still slower pace Blueskin went back. He looked up at the house again, but with the same result.

"I wonder," he muttered, "what I had better do. I shall learn nothing by walking to and fro in front of the house, for I have seen all I can. Are they in there? That is the question I must first have answered. If I know, I should then be able to act. Is Jonathan himself at home, too? I ought to learn that, and, if possible, what have been the occurrences of the past few days. I will go in here, and trust to my disguise being good enough to preserve me from being recognised."

He reached that public-house in Newgate-street as he spoke, which must, from the singularity of its sign, be well known.

It is on the north side of Newgate-street, and nearly facing the stone wall at the end of the prison.

The sign is the "Magpie and Stump."

From its contiguity it was much used by Wild's janizaries—in fact, it was very seldom but that one, if not more of them, were in the house.

In his proper character, Blueskin had been there times out of number, and so he was putting his disguise to a very severe test when he determined to go in there and endeavour to obtain what information he required.

It is more than probable that, if he had stayed to effect, he would not have entered; but, as it was, no sooner did he frame the resolution than he executed it.

He made his way down the passage until he came to a door, which opened into the front room where the company usually assembled.

A fire that was smouldering in the grate, and an oil-lamp depending from the ceiling, showed him the inmates.

They were two men, who were seated at a small table on one side of the room, and Flood and Levee, who had placed themselves on a screen which served to keep off the draught of the door.

All looked up as Blake entered, but their attention only rested upon him for a moment.

In fact, they gave merely a casual glance, as anyone would do upon a new-comer entering an apartment in which they sat.

He was glad to see they did not recognise him.

He crossed the room and sat down on the window seat, and called for something to drink.

In doing this he took care to assume the swaggering air which the wearer of such a dress as his was would assume.

While he did it he took care to fix his eyes upon his two old companions, and note the effect it had upon them.

Something in the tones appeared to reach their ears with a familiar sound, for they looked up quickly and inquisitively.

But they took no further notice.

As he sat upon the window-seat, Blake found he could, by drawing aside the curtain a little way, look out into the street.

The door of the thief-taker's abode was nearly opposite to him, but although it was in deep shadow, he was certain, so long as he remained where he was, no one could either go in or out of it without his knowledge.

So he sat there, and watched.

CHAPTER XCVI.

JONATHAN WILD RETURNS TO HIS HOME AT A RATHER CRITICAL AND EXCITING MOMENT.

HAD anyone asked Blueskin for what it was he watched, or what benefit he would obtain by so doing, he would have been at a loss for a reply.

The fact was, it was more in obedience to a sudden impulse than anything else that he had entered the place at all, and when he was there, and sat looking out of the

window, it was more in a listless sort of way than anything else, and all the while he was revolving in his brain what would be his best course of action.

How long he thus sat he knew not, but he was suddenly aroused by perceiving the door of Jonathan Wild's house thrown open.

The lamp in the hall cast a beam of light on to the roadway, and revealed two figures standing on the doorstep.

One was the man on the lock, who was holding the door open.

The other was Jonathan Wild.

There could be no doubt of that. The outlines of his figure were well and sharply defined by the bright light behind him, and Blueskin was too well acquainted with his looks to fall into any mistake.

He let the blind fall, allowing himself only the smallest crevice to peep through.

Wild's eyes, he knew, were preternaturally keen, and seeing some one watching might in a moment have made him suspicious that something unusual was going on.

Still he did not lose sight of his object.

It would seem that Jonathan addressed some words to the man on the lock, and then he descended the steps into the street.

The door was closed.

In the darkness he could hardly distinguish the burly form of the thief-taker, but by not removing his eyes from him he managed to do so.

Wild went in the direction of the Old Bailey, but at the corner he stopped and hailed a hackney-coach.

In a minute more he entered it, and was driven off.

This little incident filled Blueskin with thought.

Where Jonathan might have gone, or what was the business upon which he was engaged, did not occupy him for a minute. That would have been fruitless speculation.

It had the effect of determining him to attempt to carry out a plan, the details of which he had been settling in his mind.

It was bold and daring in the extreme, and that was all that could be said of it, without we add the word rash.

Yet it was one that had some prospect of success, and after Wild's departure, the more he reflected, the more decided he became to carry it out.

Levee and Flood were seated just as they were when he came in, and there did not seem to be any symptom of their quitting their present quarters for some time to come.

He waited a minute, and then rose.

The reckoning he had already paid, so he had nothing to do but to walk out.

On reaching the street, he again looked up at Wild's house.

"It is a desperate chance," he said, "but it shall be tried, at all events. I can see no other means by which I can ascertain the fates of those for whose sakes alone I care to live."

He crossed over as he spoke.

What he was about to do we shall quickly see, but we will venture to assert that it will surprise the reader.

Springing up the steps before the door, he seized the knocker with his right hand, and knocked furiously.

A gentle summons, he knew, would meet with no attention. The door was quickly opened.

But Blueskin was in readiness for action.

With one well-directed and terrific blow of his clenched fist, he laid the man prostrate.

So suddenly, too, was the deed performed, that it created no alarm, and before the man at the grating had recovered from his astonishment, Blake had closed the door, properly secured it, and sprang forward and clutched him by the throat in such a manner, that he had scarcely power to gasp for breath, let alone call out for assistance.

A moment's continuation of the pressure, and the man turned black in the face, and then fell backwards, either insensible, or dead.

It was now time for Blueskin to turn his attention to the man he had knocked down, and who, by various movements, showed that he was fast recovering his senses.

He must be speedy, too, in what he was going to do, for before long some one would be sure to come down to the hall, though he had calculated that about that time in the evening it would be deserted by all but the two men on guard.

With great dexterity he stripped off Arnold's neck-cloth—for he it was he had knocked down—and twisting it up in the fashion of a rope, placed it in his mouth, and then tied it tightly at the back of his head.

The stout leathern belt, from which his hanger was suspended, served as a means of fastening his arms behind his back, and then he was quite helpless, either to cry out or move.

This done, Blueskin, with all the speed he could make, hurried to the man who had charge of the iron-grated door leading to the cells.

No signs of returning animation, however, were there.

Stooping down, he felt about his person for his keys, and as he knew exactly where to look, he quickly possessed himself of them.

To open the grating took him but a moment.

The stone staircase was beyond.

Lifting his foot, he, with one kick, sent the unfortunate man rolling down it.

He fell against the door at the bottom with a crash.

He was hardly there, however, before Blueskin was himself.

The key of this door he had ready in his hand, and thrusting it into the keyhole, he shot the bolt back.

To one so familiar with the intricacies of the place as Blueskin was, the task of searching the whole thoroughly was by no means a matter of difficulty.

The bunch of keys he held would, he knew, open every door there was, and so, one after another, he flung them back.

At each one he called out the names of Jack and Edgworth Bess, but although he tried down all one side of the corridor, not one of the cells did he find tenanted.

Crossing over, he began the other way, for the secret door, leading to the other cells he resolved to leave till afterwards.

The second he came to was occupied by some one, but it was neither of those he sought.

He cast but one glance upon this person, for he had no time, nor had he inclination, to ask questions or lose precious time.

His life, he knew, depended upon his speed, for that the state of things in the hall above could continue for any length of time without discovery by some one, was impossible.

Three more doors were opened fruitlessly, and then he came to the cell in which Steggs was confined, though, of course, he knew it not.

Looking very much the worse for his sojourn in that dark, pestiferous place, the villain who had been the means of causing Edgworth Bess so much trouble, came forth.

Blueskin recognised him instantly, and an angry look shot from his eyes.

But he smothered his resentment, and went on with his task.

Steggs, however, did not remember to have ever seen the handsome cavalier who unlocked his prison-door, but he noticed his angry glance, and his coward heart sank within him.

He cowered down upon the cold flagstones in the corridor, and crawled along abjectly after his deliverer, entreating him to spare his life; but Blueskin was by far too intent upon the business he had in hand to pay any heed to him.

As the reader is aware, his search was a vain one, for both Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess had left the house.

Convinced that they were not in the outer cells, he ran to the secret door, opened it, passed through, and searched them, but with the same result.

A groan came from his lips, when he assured himself that they really were neither of them there.

In fact, so far did his feelings overcome him, that he was obliged to cling to the doorpost for a moment or so to keep himself from falling.

But, mastering himself by a great effort, he strove to think what he had better do.

His worst forebodings were confirmed.

"It will be vain to search further," he said. "Jonathan has either destroyed them, or hidden them in some place where it will be impossible for me to find them. Curses on his caution!"

"Spare me!" said Steggs, in louder and more supplicating tones, for, having overheard Blake's words, he gathered he was an enemy of Wild's. "Spare me! Let me go free from this place, and I will bless you. Time back, before I became the tenant of that frightful dungeon, I was an evil man, and ready to commit any deed, however desperate. But all that is altered now. Spare me!"

"Spare me, too!" said another voice, which came from the man he had first released. "Spare me, and I too will bless you, and do all I can to serve you."

"Stand aside, then," exclaimed Blueskin, "and let me pass, or I shall be a companion in your captivity. You can follow me if you choose. I should not think of hindering you, but you will most likely find that you will have to fight your way to freedom."

"We will do that—we will do that!" they cried, as they rose to their feet; and having allowed Blake to pass them, they followed him along the corridor in the direction of its exit.

Had Blueskin only been in possession of the secret means of leaving Wild's house at the back, and making his way through the old market, all would have been easy, and he would have escaped a frightful danger.

But he did not know of it.

Grasping his sword firmly by the hilt, and holding in his left hand a double-barrelled pistol, he ran up the steps to the iron grating.

Ere, however, he reached the top, he heard a well-known sound.

It was a key rattling in the lock.

He felt that a crisis had now arrived.

Discovery was inevitable, for it was Jonathan Wild himself who was seeking an entrance to his own domicile.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD PRACTISES A SUCCESSFUL MANŒUVRE, WHICH RESULTS IN WILKINSON'S TOTAL DISCOMFITURE.

DESPITE the perilous position in which our friend Blueskin is placed, on the staircase leading to the cells, we shall be obliged to leave him for a short time, while we devote a portion of our attention to the consideration of the fortunes of one of the chief actors in the story, and who has not for some time appeared in our pages.

The reader will guess that the person in question is Jack Sheppard—that strange compound of good and evil—who, it will be remembered, we last saw as he darted round the corner of Warwick-lane, fearful that Wild would alter his mind.

Why he took this direction, his heart alone could tell. It was the street into which he knew Edgworth Bess would emerge when she left the market.

With that remarkable cunning, of which Jonathan possessed so large a quantity, he had allowed him to go free, or rather appeared to do so, from the conviction that he would find Edgworth Bess quicker than anyone else, because he would have a powerful motive to urge him on to make every exertion.

And in this calculation he was most unquestionably correct.

Then, as for Jack himself, notwithstanding the hypocritical sentences he had uttered, his feelings and intentions towards him were still unchanged, and he had, in a manner of speaking, set him about as free as a cat sometimes does a mouse—that is, takes care the prey does not get out of its reach.

So with Wilkinson, who, as the reader knows, he had set to dog Jack's footsteps. His orders were that he should follow him everywhere—not lose sight of him for a moment, but, as frequently as occasion required, or opportunity offered, report his exact whereabouts.

By this means it is easy to see what a tool Jack was made of.

That Jonathan's plan would be crowned with success there seemed every indication. All that was necessary was for Wilkinson to perform his part, and one would have thought that was easy enough.

We shall see how he got on.

As we said, Jack darted round the corner of Warwick-lane, but before he had gone a dozen steps down it, he paused to listen whether any sounds of pursuit reached his ears.

Nothing, however, broke the silence.

He rubbed his head thoughtfully.

"I can't make it out," he said; "I can't make it out at all! What is Jonathan's game? Was he really in earnest in what he said about me? He seemed sincere; besides, why did he let me go free? It is clear he meant to do so, or he would have sent some one after me. I've half a mind to go back and tell him how vexed I am that I left him as I did. No, I won't, though: that will keep till another time, especially as he is a man that does not care much about politeness. I must find Bess. Where can she have gone? Not far, perhaps. She may even be somewhere near the market. I will go and see, for all seems quiet and safe."

Thus speaking, or rather thinking, Jack made his way down the narrow, unsavoury thoroughfare, until he reached the large gateway leading into the market.

Here he waited and listened.

All, however, was as still as the grave.

The place itself was quite empty and deserted, for it was the hour when the latest stayers had gone, and the earliest comers had not arrived.

Finding all so silent, he ventured to raise his voice, and call upon Edgworth Bess—first, only just above a whisper, and then rising in tone until it became a shout.

But the echoing reverberations of his voice was the only response which he obtained.

There was a dull, oppressive feeling of coming ill about his heart, when the fact was forced upon him that the girl he sought was nowhere within hearing of his voice, and he looked up and down the empty street, fearfully and forebodingly.

"Where has she gone?" he cried—"where has she gone? Unknowing her course, or what may have befallen her, what chance have I of finding her again? Oh! if Blueskin had but been spared—if I had him now by my side to advise me and consult with—I should be glad. But such regrets are useless, though I can yet avenge his death. And I will do it, even as he would have avenged mine."

He was silent for a moment.

"But first," he said, "the whole of my energies—the whole of my attention—shall be devoted to the task of finding the poor girl, who has, in so short a period of time seen so much suffering. If ill befalls her, Jonathan Wild, beware! for you shall bitterly rue the day when you took part against her."

The slight accession of passion which he felt, soon passed away, and then he set about the task of searching on the ground, in the hope that by so doing he might discover something that would give him a clue to the route she had taken.

But in the hope of doing this he was disappointed. There was not the smallest object that would serve to guide him anywhere to be seen.

With the conviction pressing upon him that he must trust to chance alone to aid him, he walked slowly and dejectedly towards Paternoster-row.

At Amen-corner he halted.

Two roads lay before him—either of which might have been taken by the object of his search, and both leading in opposite directions.

One was Paternoster-row.

The other Ave-Maria-lane.

He was irresolute.

In her perturbation of mind, he thought it probable enough that she might have taken either of them, without giving it a thought which would be the safest.

"If she considered at all," he said, "she would try to find her way to Drury-lane. The only friends she knows of are there. I will go and see if she has done so."

Having come to this determination, he walked on as far as Ludgate-hill; and, although he knew it not, treading almost in the footsteps of Edgworth Bess.

The clock in St. Paul's cathedral chimed three-quarters past something, but what the hour was, Jack had not an accurate idea.

"She must have gone to Drury-lane!" he repeated, as he turned the corner. "The more I think of it the more certain I feel that that is what she would do. How foolish it was of me to feel so alarmed as I did! It is all right enough! Quite!—What's that?"

A slight sound from somewhere behind him now arrested his attention.

Upon looking back, which he did instantly and instinctively, he saw the dusky figure of a man.

Who it was he had no idea.

"Some late passenger, I suppose," he said, as he continued on his way; "and yet, where did he come from? How is it I did not hear his footstep before?"

These questions aroused a little suspicion in Jack's breast, although the thought that some one had been set to watch him by Wild did not occur to him.

Jack slackened his pace a little, in the hope that whoever it was behind him would pass him; but this was not done, and he soon found his own anxiety and impatience too great for him to loiter.

Accordingly he resumed his wonted pace.

Even as Bess had done about an hour before him, he reached that part of Ludgate-hill where it is divided from Fleet-street by Fleet-market.

Now all about this spot was quite silent, and showed no traces of the presence of those who had hunted the poor girl like some wild animal through the streets.

What has been her fate?

We shudder as we ask the question.

Jack heard the footsteps behind him slowly approach.

"I will cross over," he muttered. "It may be some one who has an object in tracking me, for my escape from Newgate is doubtless by this time pretty widely known. I will cross over, and if he attempts to follow me up Fleet-street, I will dispose of him."

With these words on his lips, Jack crossed the street, and then listened with some eagerness whether the man behind followed him. He did so.

Yet Jack thought it might be the result of accident, and that he should keep straight on was only natural.

Before he took any steps, therefore, to get rid of him, it would be necessary to obtain further evidence that he was actually following in his track.

"I will run," said Jack, "and that as fast as possible. Not only will it take me sooner to my destination, but set all my doubts at rest."

Without delay, Jack set off at a speed that was really surprising.

Wilkinson, who was behind, seeing this sudden movement, and being fearful that his prey would escape him, began to run too, and that at a prodigious rate.

He had, in fact, trained himself to running, and there were very few indeed who could surpass him.

And now Jack, having ascertained that the man behind was really in pursuit of him, resolved to put an end to it, for although he might have distanced him by running, yet he did not desire to try.

Therefore, finding that his pursuer was coming on after him at full-speed, he suddenly dropped down upon his hands and knees in the middle of the path.

It was too dark, and Jack was too far off, for Wilkinson to see the movement; but he heard the sudden cessation of his rapid steps, and so, fearful that he had eluded him in some way or other, rushed blindly on with redoubled speed.

Intent on looking before him, he did not notice the dark form crouching down in his path, and the consequence was, he caught his feet against him.

Over he went in a moment, with his head ploughing the stones, and his heels in the air.

Such, too, was his impetuosity, that he scudded along for several feet before he could stop himself.

Jack Sheppard, in spite of the anxiety that was tugging at his heart, could not forbear a laugh as he witnessed the complete discomfiture of his foe.

He quickly scrambled to his feet.

Then, walking to where Wilkinson lay immovable upon the stones, he kicked him over on to his back.

The light from a contiguous oil-lamp fell upon his face and figure.

"Why, it's Jonathan Wild's man," he said. "What did he want after me?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD FINDS A TRACE OF POOR BESS WITHOUT KNOWING IT, AND IS ATTACKED BY THE OFFICERS AT THE INN.

THIS was one of those questions which was more easily asked than answered; but nevertheless, it set Jack thinking.

But acute as he generally was, his intellect was not subtle enough to enable him to arrive at a true solution of the affair, though that there was something more in Wild setting him free than could be perceived at a first glance, he felt quite certain.

He stooped down over the form of the prostrate janizary, to ascertain if possible the extent of his injuries, and obtain some information from him.

But Wilkinson's head was not hard enough to stand with impunity such a crack as it had had upon the hard flagstones. He lay like a log of wood.

Finding there was no chance of doing as he desired, and not wishing to delay in reaching the "Black Lion," he rose and left him to his fate.

But the thought occurring to him that he was unarmed, and that circumstances might arise when the possession of weapons would be of the utmost importance to him, he stooped down to ascertain what his foe carried.

In his capacious coat-pockets he found a brace of pistols, primed and loaded.

At his girdle a belt carrying a hanger.

Of these he possessed himself, as well as of a formidable-looking clasp-knife, which had a spring in the back to keep the blade from closing.

The stout oaken cudgel, or bludgeon, he thought it hardly worth while to encumber himself with.

To do all this occupied scarcely two minutes, and he then set off at a run down the street.

Temple-bar was quickly passed, and the open space in the Strand, called Picket-place, in which St. Clement Dane's church is situated, gained.

Keeping the church-railings on his left hand he shaped his course in a straight line to the bottom of Wych-street.

But in his progress he suddenly trod upon something soft and slippery, and although he strived to regain his footing, he was precipitated to the ground.

An execration came from his lips at this untoward incident.

He was soon up again, but in assisting himself to rise, he put his hand into some cold, sticky substance which sent an involuntary shudder through his whole body.

Full of curiosity to know what it was, and yet having a pretty good idea, he held up his hand to look.

Just where he stood there was rather more light than in other places, which may be accounted for by the buildings being further apart from each other than they are in the streets.

The new day was coming, and the sky overhead wore a dull, leaden tinge.

But it shed some faint amount of illumination upon the earth.

Jack looked at his hand.

It was covered with blood.

"Just what I thought," he said; and with his other hand he felt the different parts of his clothes. "I am covered! What will be thought by those whose me? Confound it! what can have been the matter? There's a good quantity of blood upon the ground," he added, as he looked down. "There's been a regular fight, I should think, and half a dozen people bled to death!"

Jack spoke lightly.

How changed would have been the accents of his voice had he but known the real facts of the case—that the spot upon which he then stood was where Edgworth Bess had been hemmed in by the Mohawks not an hour before.

Perhaps it was as well that he was spared that knowledge for the present, or it would assuredly have driven him mad.

And yet some mysterious influence seemed to be at work—one of those presentiments of coming evil, which all of us must more than once have experienced, overshadowed his soul.

It was in vain he tried to struggle against the feeling. So far from dissipating it, all he seemed to do was to make its proportions more terrifying and gigantic.

Three minutes now, however, at the most, and he would know the worst.

Gladly would he have ran along Wych-street, but his agitation was too great, and his heart palpitated too quickly for him to be able to do so.

Then he reached the house in which, although he knew it not, the happiest days of his life had been spent.

It was that of his master, John Roots.

Never since that night when he was first introduced to the readers of this narrative, standing in the street, with clenched hands and heaving breast, pouring out maledictions upon his master, had he passed this spot, and now it was not possible for him to do so without emotion.

Anger yet burned fiercely in his breast as he thought of his real and imaginary wrongs, but he did not stay to give them utterance.

He hurried on.

The door of the "Black Lion" was reached.

It was open and the shutters were down, but there came from within no sounds of drunken merriment or quarrel such as might be heard in any one of the twenty-four hours.

All was silent and deserted.

The stillness of the place, and the different aspect which it wore from what it had upon the other occasions when he had seen it, increased Jack's agitation, and he was forced to cling to the door-post for support.

But recovering himself by an almost superhuman effort, he staggered in.

He pushed open the swinging half-glass door which was hung a few feet inside the passage.

The inside of the house looked dark and dreary.

No living person was in sight.

He had all the inclination to call for some one, but his tongue refused to obey the mandate of his will.

Well acquainted with the road as he was, he did not experience any difficulty, although it was so dark, in making his way into the kitchen where he had received an avowal of love from the young girl whose champion he had so strangely become.

No one was there.

In fact, that happened to be just the time when the least business was doing at the inn—that hour indeed, when London in all respects resembles a city of the dead.

A footstep, however, soon disturbed the silence of the place, and Jack waited anxiously for it to approach.

That it was nearing the kitchen he felt confident.

He leant back against one of the tables, and clutched its edges nervously with both hands.

A fire still burned in the grate, and diffused a faint, ruddy light around it, and by the aid of this he saw entered the kitchen a strange apology for a human being in the shape of a servant.

Dirty and ragged, with her eyes more than half-closed with sleep, she tottered in.

She was maid-of-all-work to the establishment.

Jack spoke.

One would have thought that the unexpected sound of a human voice would have startled her sensibilities, but, alas! that it should be so, she had no sensibilities to startle.

With an anxiety of which none of the readers of this history can conceive an adequate idea, Jack asked this benighted being questions the answers to which would either set all his doubts at rest, and send a shrill of unutterable delight through his whole body, or fill him with horror, despair, and anguish.

He fairly groaned aloud when he was assured that the poor, prosecuted girl had most certainly not arrived, nor been seen by any one about the place since the occasion of her last mysterious leaving of it.

"Where is Johnson?" Jack gasped, at length. "Where is he? I must see him. Where is he?" "A-bed!" said the servant, gruffly; "and I vallys my 'ed more 'n to go and wake him." "I will go," said Jack. "Show me his room. Where is it?"

But before the servant could reply, there was a sudden rush of footsteps in the passage.

Jack's eyes had grown familiar to the semi-darkness in the place, and a glance showed him that those who had entered so hastily were police-officers.

Then his eyes were dazzled by the broad, bright beam of light, which issued through the lens of a dark lantern, which was carried by one of them.

"That's him," cried a voice, immediately. "Hurrah! we have him safe enough. There he is!"

The men, who were in number about a dozen, precipitated themselves into the room as they spoke, and almost before Jack could recover from his surprise at their first appearance.

But recovering himself instantaneously, he drew the brace of pistols he had taken from Wilkinson's pocket, and, pointing them at the throng of officers, commanded them to draw back.

At the same time he retreated further into the kitchen, with the firm resolution of selling his life dearly, and of not allowing himself to be captured alive.

The officers completely blocked up the doorway of the kitchen, so it was impossible for him to think of making his escape from them that way.

The police themselves hesitated a little when they saw Jack's determined behaviour, and he took advantage of it to adroitly place a table between himself and them.

It was but a poor barrier, it is true, but still it was better than nothing.

The hesitation of the officers, however, was but momentary. One, who appeared to be in command of the rest, gave the word for them to rush forward and secure their prisoner.

They obeyed, and rushed forward in a compact body, strong enough to carry all before it.

The table behind which Jack had intrenched himself was overturned.

Then two shots were fired.

The report of the pistols rang out with great effect in the confined space.

The place was filled with smoke, blue and pungent, which much increased the difficulty of perceiving objects.

Some curses and groans arose, which showed that the pistols had not been discharged without doing execution.

Two of the officers had, in fact, been hit, and severely wounded.

The remainder dispersed themselves about the kitchen, searching into all the corners they could find with the blades of their cutlasses, and flashing their lanterns about them.

But Jack Sheppard had disappeared.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE POOR WIDOW WOMAN ASSISTS JACK TO CONCEAL HIMSELF FROM HIS FOES.

At the moment the officer in command gave the order for the others to charge, Jack drew back from the table, and turning round, made his way across the kitchen to where he knew the stairs were situated.

The only chance he had of escape was to mount them before the officers were aware of it, and this, under the cover of the darkness, he was able to do.

To better conceal his retreat, he had hastily aimed his pistols at the police, and pulled the triggers; then without waiting an instant, opened the door at the foot of the staircase, and having closed it after him as silently as he could, bounded up.

Everything now would depend upon the rapidity of his movements, for he did not anticipate that the police could be long in ignorance of the way he had gone.

In fact, ere he had well reached the first landing a loud cry from those below made him aware they already suspected the means by which he had made his exit.

Fain would he have called upon Johnson for assistance, and which he made no doubt he would have been well able to afford him.

But to have cried out would have been to point to his whereabouts and entail discovery, so he was altogether thrown upon his own resources.

His situation was a critical and perilous one, indeed, for though there might be many hiding-places in the building, yet he was not in a position to turn them to any advantage.

He had never made an examination of the upper part of the house—had, in fact, never visited it except upon one occasion, and there was no knowing how soon he might run into a corner, and be unable to escape.

That risk—and a fearful one it was, he would have to run, and trust to good luck to befriend him.

As his foes were so close behind him, he did not pause upon the first landing, but ran up the second flight of stairs.

At the top were several doors.

Without waiting to make choice of any, Jack put his hand upon the handle of the first he came to.

It yielded, and he stepped inside a room.



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD LAYING IN AMBUSH FOR THE TRAVELLERS.]

All was profoundly dark, but a faint, smothered cry from some one reached his ears.

"Silence, if you value your life," he said, in suppressed tones, but yet such as showed how terribly he was in earnest. "Silence, for your life."

He hastily, but silently, closed the door as he spoke.

Then he ran his hand down the edge of it, to try and find a fastening of some kind, but he could not.

"Who is it?" said a voice, from one corner of the room. "Speak again. Who are you?"

The voice was evidently feminine.

"One who stands in danger of his life," replied Jack, crossing the room in the direction of the sound. "Save me from my pursuers. Hark! do you hear their footsteps? In another moment they will be here."

The clatter which the officers made in ascending the stairs fully testified to the truth of Jack's words.

"Who are you, then?" said the voice again. "What do you want with me?"

"To save me!"

"How?"

"Show me some place in this room where I may conceal myself, and if you are asked whether you have seen me say no."

"There is nowhere," said the voice again. "Tell me who you are; I seem to know your voice."

"Never mind who I am," said Jack; "there is no time to talk about that. Where can I hide? Quick! In another moment they will be at the door."

"I am a poor, lone widow," said the voice, which Jack had found came from a woman, who was sleeping in a wretched bed. "I can do nothing for you, or I would, with all my heart."

Jack heard the sounds of weeping.

"Where can I conceal myself?" he asked. "Are you sure you know of no place? Will you try to save me, or will you see me slain before your eyes, for I am determined not to surrender myself alive."

"Alas—alas!" replied the woman. "I know of no way to serve you, or else I would gladly do so. Ah! they are here!"

The officers of police reached the door at that moment.

"It is the only chance I have," said Jack. "Are you alone?"

"Quite."

"I must get into bed with you, and you must conceal me as well as you can with the clothes. When my foes enter, you must tell them you have not seen me. There is no time to delay or expostulate. Allow me to do as I say, or else you will be my murderess."

More dead than alive, the poor woman, who could tell Jack was young, and who possessed a gentle heart, suffered him to do as he had said, though, for her own part, she did not think the place would answer his purpose.

With great speed Jack got beneath the clothes.

The bedstead was placed against the wall, and it was towards that that he got, screwing himself up into as small a compass as he possibly could.

He had just time to whisper a last injunction to the woman, who was trembling in every limb, when the door was violently thrown open, and the officers rushed into the room.

By this time they had all provided themselves with lanterns, or nearly so, and therefore they were able to see, with tolerable distinctness, all about the wretched chamber.

The fright which the poor woman displayed, and the tears she shed, were ascribed to the alarm which she would naturally feel upon the sudden irruption of a number of armed men.

In a stern tone of voice the commanding officer asked her whether she had seen or heard any one enter the room, and to the question she returned, in a trembling voice, a negative reply.

The whole of the place was rapidly, but rigidly searched. Of course, as they did not look where he lay concealed, it was fruitless.

Poor Jack was almost stifled, but still he did not dare to move to get a little air, for fear of betraying his hiding-place.

The woman, who must have been a kind-hearted creature, did all she could to conceal him.

In this she succeeded, for, in a few minutes, the officers withdrew, feeling assured that he was not in that room at least.

To prevent his entering it, however, and their so having their search for nothing, one of their number was placed as a sentinel on the landing outside the door.

As soon as he found the last had departed, Jack left his place of concealment, and drew a long breath at the narrow escape he had had.

He did not dare to whisper even to the woman, for fear that the sound should reach the ears of the man outside.

In silence, therefore—and the pair of them listening to all the various sounds which disturbed the house—they sat upon the edge of the bed.

The tears still flowed from the eyes of the poor widow, for she felt a woman's terror for the dangerous position in which Jack was placed.

Both thought the search would never end.

At length, however, the men could be heard descending the staircase, slowly, and as if baffled in their object.

"Thank heaven," said the woman, as the echo of the last footstep died away, "thank heaven! you are saved."

"Say, rather, thank you," replied Jack, "for had you not acted as you did, I should now have been with the dead. I shall be ever grateful to you."

"Do not mention it. What I did was done willingly enough, goodness knows. There was something about your voice which seemed to remind me of my poor son. But you cannot be him, for he was hung at Tyburn two years ago."

"At Tyburn?"

"Yes, but do not think he deserved that death. It was Jonathan Wild who swore to bring him there, and he kept his oath."

"Jonathan Wild?" repeated Jack, while a most uncomfortable feeling crept over him, as he thought that Jonathan had sworn he should share a similar fate; "he is my foe."

"Does he hunt you?" asked the widow, eagerly.

"Even so."

"Then I pity you. You are young, and it is always

hard for the young to die; but you will before you are many weeks older. The enemies of Jonathan Wild never live."

"I despise him," said Jack, assuming a defiant air which he was far from feeling. "I have too much to live for to die yet. I live, as well, in hopes of defeating him in his most cherished schemes. He is a villain. The blood of my dearest friend calls upon me for vengeance. Let him beware, for I will have it to the full!"

"Lost—lost!" moaned the poor woman. "As it was with you, so it was even with my son; but he perished—yes, he perished—and Jonathan Wild triumphed."

"Hush!" said Jack, "do not speak so loud, for fear we should be overheard. Listen to me. For what you have done to save me I feel deeply grateful; in what way can I serve you?"

"I wish for no reward."

"But you shall have it," said Jack. "Money must be of service to you. I have none now, but I soon shall have. Let me know your name, in order that when I come again I may inquire for you."

"I do not wish to be rewarded further for what I have done than I already am."

"But I insist upon it. What is your name?"

"Lawrence," replied the poor widow.

"Enough," said Jack. "The room gets lighter every moment. Slip on your clothes and run down stairs, and ascertain whether the officers have left the premises. You can go down without attracting suspicion. Above all, try to see Johnson, and let him know where I am, and he will then devise some means of getting me away."

In obedience to his words the woman hastily huddled on the few rags which served her for clothing, and then stole down the staircase.

CHAPTER C.

JACK SHEPPARD'S PERPLEXITIES AT THE "BLACK LION" INCREASE.

EAGERLY, most eagerly, did Jack Sheppard listen until he heard the last faint sounds of the widow's retreating footsteps.

Then, as he sat upon the bedside, he rested his head in his hands and thought.

Thought of his friend Blueskin, who, as the reader is aware, he imagined to be dead.

Thought of the poor persecuted girl, to whom his heart clung so closely, and for whom alone he only cared to live.

Thought of his own dangerous situation, his inability to aid her, his own crimes and unworthiness.

Thought, too, last of all, with deep hatred at his heart, of the arch villain, Jonathan Wild, by whose infernal machinations most of this had been brought about.

And as he took a mental review of the past, and speculated upon the future, he grew almost frantic.

So absorbed was he, that he did not hear the woman ascend the stairs. It was the opening of the door that aroused him.

He sprang to his feet, but the woman called to him to be quiet.

Then, going to the window, she drew aside the apology for a curtain which covered it, and allowed what light there was outside to penetrate the chamber.

The dawn of the new day had fairly come, and a dull, cold, gray, misty twilight filled the room.

But it was sufficient to enable the occupants to separate the different objects in it, and distinguish their own outlines.

Jack crept close to her.

As she was standing near the window he was able to note the expression of her features.

So far as he was able to tell, she seemed to be a woman of about fifty years of age, though it is probable that care and want had made her look prematurely old.

Her face was very thin, and of that ghastly sallowness so often seen upon the countenances of the inhabitants of the more densely populated portions of the metropolis.

Her hair was thin and scanty; gray in colour, and now in a most dishevelled state.

Her clothes, and the manner in which they hung about her person, as well as, in fact, her whole appearance, betokened extreme poverty.

All these particulars Jack was able to take in at a glance.

"Have they gone?" he asked, scarcely raising his voice above a whisper.

A shake of the head was the reply.

"And Jokason; have you spoken to him?"

"I have."

"And without exciting suspicion?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say when you told him I was here?"

"Expressed no surprise, but merely said that you must be content to remain for the present where you now are, and then he would see what he could do for you."

"I must be satisfied with that assurance, I suppose."

"You must."

"And what about the officers?"

"They are one and all firmly of opinion that you are concealed somewhere in the house."

"Indeed."

"Yes, they say it is impossible that you could have left it, and they are determined to find out your hiding-place."

"Are they below?"

"Some are, I think; but not all."

"The remainder, I suppose, are stationed outside?"

"I do not know."

"Curses upon them!" said Jack, bitterly; "to be cooped up here is almost worse than captivity or death. Events of the greatest moment call for my immediate attention. If I stay here I shall go mad."

"Calm yourself," said the widow, gently, "and bear your confinement as patiently as you can. It must surely be better for you to be confined here than in Newgate!"

"No—not so! I should know the worst, then; and now I shall be in a continuous dread. What will become of her? Where is she now? Without a strong arm to protect her, not many hours will elapse before she falls again into the hands of her enemies. It will kill me to stay here."

The poor woman looked with great surprise at Jack as he uttered these words. She could not comprehend them.

"Is there no means by which I can leave this place?" said Jack, after a brief pause.

"None, without the risk of capture and detection."

"Show me the way," said Jack, "and I will dare all that may happen. To remain here is utterly impossible!"

He went to the window as he spoke, and looked out.

It overlooked a small yard at the rear of the inn, but the buildings round about were either too high up or too low down for them to be at all available to him.

"You cannot get out that way!" said the widow, "let me persuade you to wait until Johnson comes. It may not be long before he is here, and doubtless he will be able to suggest a means by which you can be free."

"I will," said Jack, throwing himself upon the bed, "but it will be no easy matter to curb my impatience until he comes. Not that I think I could get far away, for the whole neighbourhood is doubtless well watched."

"You are the best judge of that, but if Jonathan Wild is your enemy, it is in vain for you to struggle against your fate."

"But those were not Jonathan's men who came after me," cried Jack; "I did not think of that before, but I am sure they are not."

"That I don't know. Hark!"

"What?"

"Do you not hear?"

"No; what is it?"

"A footstep!"

"On the stairs?"

"Yes, quick, quick! Hide yourself, or you are lost. Conceal yourself under the clothes as well as you are able, and I will answer for your not being here."

The sound of some one ascending the stairs now came with very great plainness to Jack's ears.

As quickly as he could, he hastened to the bed, and hid himself beneath the clothes, which were piled upon it in a disordered heap.

Nearer and nearer came the footstep.

It was evidently a man's.

The widow's heart beat even more painfully and

anxiously than Jack's did as she heard the step approach.

And yet, had it not been for the peculiar circumstances, she would have thought nothing of it. The house was occupied by several families, and of course there was much going up and down stairs. At any rate, it could scarcely be said that it boded any special danger to Jack.

When the step, however, paused at her door, and the latch lifted, the widow was ready to swoon.

Jack's very artificial hiding-place would surely not escape discovery.

But when the door opened a little way, and the form of Johnson, the landlord, appeared, no words could describe the revulsion of feeling which she experienced.

Gliding in stealthily, he closed the door behind him.

"Where is Jack, Mrs. Lawrence?" he asked, in a whisper.

"In the bed."

Hearing the sound of their voices in conversation, Jack ventured to look up.

Upon seeing who it was, he bounded from the bed.

"Get me out of this, Johnson," he cried. "To stay here will be worse than death. Show me a means by which I can escape."

"Gently, gently," rejoined Johnson. "Do not be quite so fast. You will find it a very difficult matter to get away from here."

"Why?"

"The officers are in force, and they are firmly possessed with the idea that you are hidden somewhere in the building, and they are only waiting for the day to come in order to make a thorough search."

"But they are not Jonathan Wild's men, are they?"

"No, not one of them. They all come direct from Newgate. There's none of them know how you managed to escape. How was it?"

"I must defer telling you that until I have a better opportunity. At present I must get you to devote all your thoughts to getting me away from here."

"That, then, you may as well know first as last is impossible."

"Impossible?"

"Yes."

"You would have said that, I expect, if you had been in my place in Newgate."

"Perhaps I should. But do you happen to know that the whole of the neighbourhood is closely watched by the police, and that you would never be able to leave unseen."

"But what am I to do?"

"I can only propose one thing."

"And what is that?"

"To conceal you somewhere in the inn, where it would be next to an impossibility for them to find you."

"Can you do this?"

"I think so."

"But how long should I have to remain there?"

"Until it was safe for you to leave, of course."

"But, Johnson, look here. You remember Edgworth Bess?"

"To be sure I do. Would it be possible for any one, who has once known her, to forget her?"

"I think not. But seriously, my friend, when did you see her last?"

"You alarm me, Jack. What has happened? Surely she is in no danger. Speak."

"When did you see her last?"

"Why, when you and her and Blueskin went through the cellars to my other crib in White Hart-street."

"Then you have not seen her to-night?"

"To-night! no. What made you think I should?"

"I will tell you."

Jack then proceeded to relate all that had happened since the occasion the landlord spoke of; but as the reader is already in possession of the fullest details respecting those events, it is unnecessary to give the narration in Jack's own words.

The countenance of Johnson exhibited an expression of the greatest alarm and uneasiness when he learned the disappearance of Edgworth Bess. During the time she had been under his roof, short though it was, the amiability and cheerfulness of her disposition had endeared her to him in a greater degree than one would have imagined, considering the character of the man, and that

he was one to whom the kindlier and gentler feelings of our nature are strangers.

"Now, Johnson," said Jack, as he finished, "I appeal to you. What am I to do? Blueskin, the friend who always saw the best way out of danger, is, as I have told you, no more. Therefore, I ask you, what am I to do?"

CHAPTER CI.

JOHNSON, THE LANDLORD, SHOWS JACK SHEPPARD A CUNNINGLY-CONSTRUCTED HIDING-PLACE IN THE STAIRS.

JOHNSON shook his head.

"I wish I could tell you what would be your best course of action," he said; "but, if you will believe me, I feel fairly at a loss."

"I must get away from here."

"I don't doubt that would be the best, but then you should consider"—

"I do."

"How do you propose to act, yourself? If you have already determined, it is useless for me to suggest anything."

"Forgive me, Johnson; I should not have spoken as I did. I have no plan, but only a desire, and that is to get away from here."

"That is only natural, but yet utter madness. What good would it do for you to throw yourself into the arms of the Philistines? Rest assured, if you do, they will not let you go again. Then let me ask you, suppose you are put in Newgate, what chance will you have of aiding the poor girl then? and that she stands in need of your succour I feel confident."

"It is that which maddens me."

"Hush!" said Johnson: "calm yourself, or you will be heard by those below. I must begone, too, or my long absence may excite remark, if not suspicion. Be still!"

Jack sank back upon the bed from which he had risen.

"Believe me," continued the landlord, "that in the present awkward posture of affairs, the best and only thing you can do is to consent to the course which I at first proposed. It is the only one that presents any reasonable prospect of success."

"And that is, to remain hidden here?"

"Exactly. You may not have to stay more than an hour or two, who knows? Perhaps not even so long."

"And perhaps three days."

"You must stand your chance of that; better endure captivity voluntarily than against your will."

"And to where do you propose to lead me?"

"That I will tell you shortly. Stay where you are a moment, while I go and see whether the coast is clear."

As he uttered these words, Johnson went towards the room door, and, opening it a little way, put his head out and listened.

The day was now coming fast, and as it was only for this that the officers waited, their renewed search might be looked for every moment.

All was silent in the direction of the staircase, so Johnson beckoned Jack towards him.

But before the latter obeyed the summons, he whispered in the ear of the widow, who had been of such essential service to him, a renewal of the promise he had made, to testify how deeply he felt her kindest.

This done, he rejoined Johnson.

"Tread lightly, for your life," he said.

"Must we descend the stairs?"

"Only the first flight."

"And where is the hiding-place?"

"That I will soon show you. The only thing I want to impress upon you, is to be perfectly silent in all your movements."

"You can trust me."

As noiselessly, then, as foot could fall, the pair crept down the staircase.

The widow stood at the top, looking down at them with fearful interest, but Johnson, as soon as he perceived her, made a rapid and imperative sign for her to retire, which she immediately obeyed.

To go as quietly as they did, necessitated their going slowly, so that, although the flight of stairs was only

twelve in number, yet it took them a long time to reach the bottom.

Upon doing so, however, Johnson made a sign to Jack to remain just where he was while he crept to the head of the next flight of stairs, and which went down to the ground floor, in order to listen again, and further make sure that no one was observing.

This excess of caution made Jack impatient, but the landlord was unquestionably right.

Finding all secured, he stealthily returned, and touched Jack on the shoulder to arrest the whole of his attention.

Expecting something to happen of rather an extraordinary character, Jack readily complied.

It so happened, however, that just where they were then standing was the darkest part in all the staircase, so that he had to strain his eyes somewhat to see what was going forward.

In the first place, then, he observed Johnson count the fifth stair from the bottom.

This done, he proceeded to catch hold of the edge of it, much in the manner that one would take hold of a sliding shelf to draw it from its position.

But he tugged at it in vain, for it did not move.

He pulled Jack towards him, and whispered in his ear—"The top of this stair is not fixed, like the rest, but made to slide in and out of a groove. Beneath is a place large enough for you to lie down in, but it is so long since any use was made of it, that the wood has stuck. Help me to pull gently, and then it will come out."

This was enough to make Jack fully aware of the nature of the proposed hiding-place, and he set about giving effectual assistance.

Taking hold of the stair with both hands close together near one end, he whispered to Johnson to do the same, and both exerting a uniform amount of strength, they had the satisfaction of seeing the sliding piece of wood yield gradually to it.

When it was quite taken out, it revealed a dark-looking place, which could, however, only be perceived by being of a deeper shade than the stairs above and below it.

"In with you," whispered Johnson, "you have no time to lose!"

But Jack held back a little for the place looked exceedingly forbidding.

"In with you!" repeated Johnson, "the place is a great deal more comfortable than it looks; you will find the inside lined throughout with thick felt; and then, as for discovery, that is out of the question: I dare wager my life they will never find you here!"

And, indeed, the landlord's eulogiums were far from being ill placed, for a better hiding-place, and one more likely to elude discovery, could not be imagined.

Overcoming, then, his repugnance as well as he was able, Jack got into the coffin-like place.

For his slender anatomy he found there was ample accommodation, and the words of the landlord about its being more comfortable than it looked, were fully borne out.

As soon as he was fairly in, the landlord began to replace the sliding top of the stair.

"How about air for breathing?" asked Jack, before the aperture was quite closed.

"Oh! you'll find that all right," was the reply. "All you have to do is to remain quite still until I come to let you out."

"Or till I am discovered."

"You have no occasion to frighten yourself about that. They will never find you, without they pull the place all to pieces, and that they are not very likely to do. Now, quick, before I close it, are you all right?"

"All right!" responded Jack.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than Johnson slid the top board of the stair into its accustomed place, and when that was done it did not present to the closest examination the least difference in appearance to the others.

To make sure that all was just as it should be, however, the landlord trod upon the stair, to find whether it was as firm as the others.

He was rejoiced to find it equally so.

Then, feeling that he had already been longer absent from the officers than was exactly prudent, he descended the stairs.

The greater part of them, he found, were seated in the

kitchen, whiling away the time till daylight by something good to drink.

They were quite contented in their minds about their prey, for their measures in stationing men in different places were so well taken that they were convinced he could not leave without being seen by one or other of them.

Johnson noticed that, as he came down stairs, they looked keenly and inquisitively at him.

But whatever suspicion may have had a place in their minds was pretty well dissipated by the words he uttered.

"I have just been up to my wife, gentlemen, and she has given me leave to let you have just what you like to order."

There was a general laugh at this, for those who frequented the "Black Lion" were well aware that in that household, like many others, "the gray mare was the better horse."

So, as his wife was at the time actually up stairs in bed, the sentence seemed quite a natural one to utter.

But as soon as the laugh had died away, the officer in command of the rest exclaimed—

"Come, my lads, no more dallying. We have light enough for our purpose now, and if the young rascal is anywhere in the house, I'll bet you a five-pound note I find him."

Nothing would have pleased Johnson better than to have called out, "Done!" only the manifest impolicy of doing so restrained him.

The manner in which this officer gave his orders to the men was quite sufficient to show that he had not only attentively considered his position, but was also well used to that sort of thing.

Every portion of the building was submitted to a most searching investigation.

Indeed, so systematically was the search pursued, that Johnson began to dread that the cunningly contrived hiding-place would, after all, be discovered.

But this dread proved unfounded, and, not to unnecessarily prolong the narrative, after prying into every nook and corner of the building, and then searching the neighbouring houses, the officers withdrew, baffled and defeated, perfectly convinced that, despite all their precautions, their prey had managed in some way to elude them.

When he deemed it safe to do so, Johnson went upstairs, and released Jack Sheppard from his place of durance.

He would then have quitted the place, and commenced the pursuit about which he felt so anxious, only he suffered himself to be restrained by the landlord, and he was afterwards glad he did so, for an unexpected event took place, which we shall immediately proceed to describe.

CHAPTER CII.

SHOWS THE MANNER IN WHICH BLUESKIN ESCAPED FROM JONATHAN WILD, AND MET JACK SHEPPARD IN DEURY-LANE.

WHEN Blueskin heard the rattling sound which Wild's key produced when that worthy rather roughly thrust it into the lock of the front door, he felt that to hesitate would be fatal, so he sprang up the remainder of the steps.

He was in hopes of being able to reach the hall before Jonathan got the door open, which would have given him an immense advantage over his foe; but in this he was mistaken.

Wild got the door open first.

An angry howl came from his lips when he saw the condition of his janitor, and anticipating that something unusual was amiss, he, with great presence of mind, put a whistle to his lips, and blew a shrill blast upon it.

This was a general signal to all those members of his band who might be within hearing to hasten to his assistance.

The last notes had not left the instrument, however, before Blueskin reached the passage.

His drawn sword was in his hand, and its brightly polished blade appeared to collect all the rays of light that were scattered about the place, and reflect them with tenfold brilliancy.

For a brief space of time, during which, perchance, a person might have counted three rapidly, Jonathan stood astounded and bewildered.

But recovering himself, he drew his hanger with his

right hand and a pistol with his left, and again uttering a yell that might have been heard in any part of the house, he planted his back firmly against the door.

"Who are you?" he yelled; for he did not recognise Blueskin beneath the splendid disguise which he wore.

"Who are you? Speak, or I fire!"

But Blueskin took care not to utter a word, for fear that some familiar tone should strike upon Wild's ear, and raise a suspicion of his identity.

Rushing forward with his drawn sword before him, he aimed a furious blow at the breast of the thief-taker, who with much ado, succeeded in warding it off, but that was all.

Finding himself thus resolutely attacked, he lost a portion of his usual courage.

Blueskin was not slow to take advantage of it.

An accomplished master of the art of fencing, and, moreover, having the advantage over Wild in height and length of reach, he stood every chance of being the victor—that is, provided he did not give the janizaries time to arrive.

Animated by this feeling, he attacked Jonathan with great impetuosity, and wounded him severely in two places in the breast.

But Wild would not give up. Suddenly raising the pistol to a level, he took a good aim with it at his opponent, and he would have assuredly succeeded in hitting him had not Blueskin's eye been quick enough to perceive and wrist quick enough to change the direction of the barrel.

The pistol was discharged, but its contents expended themselves harmlessly against the woodwork of the staircase.

The hurried trampling of many feet, and the confusion of many voices speaking excitedly together, reached Blake's ears, and warned him to be speedy in his movements, if he wished to escape with his life.

Collecting all his energies, he gave Wild a sudden and violent thrust.

The thief-taker tried to avoid the blow, but in vain. The sword passed through the upper part of his chest, near the shoulder, pinning him to the door.

Steggs, who had hitherto kept close behind Blueskin, now came forward, and, when he saw his enemy thus worsted, struck him a heavy blow with his fist, which at once rendered him insensible, and, upon Blake withdrawing his weapon, he fell heavily upon the floor of the hall.

Some half-dozen men now rushed down the staircase, but they knew not for a moment how to act.

Blake seized upon that moment to undo the fastenings of the door and fling it open.

Then he dashed out into the street, closely followed by the two men he had delivered from the dungeons.

He ran but a few paces, and then he stopped.

He rejoiced that he had set the two prisoners free as he had, because now, they would be the means of diverting pursuit, if any was attempted against him.

"Separate!" he cried, "choose, each of you, your own road, and if you run fast enough you will effect your escape. This is my way."

He ran down Skinner-street, as he spoke, but before he reached Snow-hill, he turned down one of the narrow turnings on his left, which, by a circuitous route would take him into Fleet-market.

The place was dark, but all its intricacies were so familiar to him that he could have almost found his way blindfold.

Crossing Fleet-market, he wound his course through the numerous courts which lie between Holborn-hill and Fleet-street.

The result of his search in Wild's house filled him with mingled feelings of hopes and fears.

Jack's indomitable resolution to overcome all possible obstacles was well-known to him, and he thought it by no means improbable that he had found some means of escaping from Wild's clutches, and taking his companion with him.

But if this was the case he made sure he should learn some intelligence of them at the "Black Lion," so he resolved to repair thither without delay.

Little prepared was he for the startling intelligence which awaited him there.

By the time he reached the well-known spot it was broad daylight.

On entering, he found the place in the utmost disorder. He was not long in learning the cause of it. We can imagine with what anxiety he awaited the result.

Although so much in the habit of frequenting the tavern, no one recognised him in his present costume.

Seating himself in the tap-room, he called for drink.

The seat he chose was one where he was most likely to be free from observation.

He could not help feeling amused at the manner in which Johnson treated him. It was plain to be seen he had no suspicion of his identity.

The length of time the officers took with their search, inspired Blueskin with the hope that they would be unsuccessful in finding Jack, and the result proved that he was quite right.

When the last of the police had withdrawn, Blueskin called Johnson, and told him who he was.

The landlord's delight, upon being made the recipient of this intelligence, knew no bounds.

Blake cautioned him, however, not to let it be known, as so much depended upon his existence being for the present kept a secret.

Johnson then confided to him the place in which he had hidden Jack.

By his advice he waited for some time yet, in order to make sure that none of the police-officers were lurking about.

Then, as we related at the end of the preceding chapter, Johnson had gone up stairs, and released Jack from his place of confinement.

He felt it to be no inconsiderable relief to be able to move his limbs freely.

He was shown by Johnson into a room on the first floor, the door leading to which was close to the foot of the stairs, so that if occasion should require it, he would be able to return to his place of concealment without loss of time.

These preliminaries having been arranged, he broke the intelligence to him that Blueskin had not, as he thought, been slain, but that he had most miraculously recovered from the terrible wound Wild had given him.

Next to seeing Edgworth Bess in a situation of perfect security, nothing would have given Jack so much real delight as to learn that his friend was spared to him.

But Johnson, bidding him to compose himself, said he would go down and send Blake up to him.

In less than five minutes after the landlord had left him he heard some one ascending the stairs.

He could not control his impatience, but going to the door, opened it and looked out.

He drew back again suddenly and disappointedly, for Johnson had not told him Blueskin was disguised, and, like the rest, he failed to recognise him in his present attire.

Blueskin walked straight up to the door of the room, and spoke.

Jack knew the tones of his voice again instantly.

Taking him by the hand, he dragged him into the chamber, and sitting down near him, began to talk.

But to relate the mutual explanations which took place between the pair would be as unnecessary as it would be uninteresting. The reader already knows all, and therefore he will be at no loss to imagine what passed between them, thus enabling us to proceed with our narrative without hindrance.

When Jack had finished the recital of his own extraordinary adventures, and narrated how he had succeeded in setting Edgworth Bess at liberty, but that since then she had disappeared, leaving no clue by which he could find her, Blueskin's face assumed a grave expression, for he anticipated the worst.

For a long time he was quite silent. He was endeavouring to account for her disappearance.

But in all his speculations he was a long long way off the truth.

The anxiety and interest which Jack felt were plainly depicted in his countenance.

"What will be the best way to act, Blueskin?" he asked; "I know I can leave it safely in your hands to decide. What shall I do?"

"That is a difficult matter, Jack, unless I say in two words, find her. They just express what I intend to do myself."

"But how? In what way shall you set about it?"

"That is the question. Have you any money?"

"None."

"I thought not—nor have I, worth mentioning. But if we are to do any good some must be had, and that at once."

"I don't dispute it; I want some even now."

"We cannot do without it. Now, Jack, you are a brave and likely young fellow! What do you say to going out to-night with a good horse and a brace of pistols to cry 'Stand and deliver!' upon the highway?"

CHAPTER CIII.

BLUESKIN'S SEARCH AFTER EDGWORTH BESS IS A VAIN ONE, AND HE PERSUADES JACK TO ACCOMPANY HIM UPON A LITTLE EXPEDITION.

"At any other time," said Jack Sheppard, "I should have jumped at such a proposal, for there is nothing that would suit me better; but as it is, I feel the whole of my energies should be turned in one direction!"

"And so they can be all the same for that. Listen to me!"

"I am doing so."

"You perceive what a difference changing my dress has made in me. Even you did not recognise me—no more did Johnson! Do as I did. Remain where you are, and send some one out to purchase you some things of a similar character, and we might walk past Wild himself without his knowing us!"

"But the money?"

"I have, I think, enough for that. Say—do you consent?"

"Willingly—if I thought I could get out of this place."

"It will be most imprudent for you to attempt to do so before nightfall. By that time the vigilance of those officers who may be watching in the neighbourhood will have relaxed."

"It will kill me to stay here inactive all day!" said Jack, pacing up and down the room.

"You must be as patient as you can. Precipitation will ruin all. Surely you can see that!"

"I will be guided by you, my friend; your head is clearer than mine; and you will know what is the most prudent course of action."

"Do so, then. Remain quiet and patient where you are—will you?"

"I will try."

"If you cannot leave the house, that is no reason why I shouldn't. In this disguise I am certain they will never know me. I have the welfare of the young girl quite as much at heart as you have, and I will go forth alone, and try to find her. What say you?"

"Can I say anything but 'yes'?"

"I will do my best to be successful; but whether I am or not I will return at dusk, and we will be off upon our excursion, for money must be had!"

"You say you have enough to purchase a disguise?"

"I have. I will call myself upon a man who can be trusted, and send him here to you. He will also take away the clothes you have been wearing. Above all, be careful of your liberty, and take my advice, do not move from here until I return."

Blueskin then withdrew.

A few words passed between him and Johnson, and then he sallied forth into Drury-lane.

By this time the ordinary business of the day had fairly commenced, and the thoroughfare was crowded with people.

He threaded his way through the busy crowd without attracting much attention.

His first visit was to a clothier's in Holywell-street, to whom he gave a description of what he required, and paid him in advance for the clothes.

As the sum he got was about three times as much as he ever expected, the shop-keeper was civil to obsequiousness, and promised that it should be seen to without delay.

This over, Blueskin commenced his search after Edgworth Bess.

He felt more alarmed and frightened at her disappearance than he would have liked to confess to himself.

Full of deep, anxious thought, he walked down Holywell-street, and emerged into the Strand.

Confident of the excellence of his disguise, he walked with an air of the greatest unconcern.

Like Jack Sheppard, the more he thought over what the young girl would be likely to do, circumstanced as she was, the more certain he felt that her first step would be to make her way to the "Black Lion" in Drury-lane.

Doubtless she had done this, and supposing so, then she must have met with some interruption on her journey.

But beyond that supposition he could not go. What sort of peril she would be likely to meet with he knew not. It might come in a thousand different shapes.

All clue, too, was lost. There was not the faintest indication to guide him as to the direction she had taken when she left the archway of the market.

Little did he think as he went down the Strand and Fleet-street, that he was walking upon the very ground over which she had been hunted by the Mohawks.

The brief autumnal day passed away, and found him no nearer the achievement of his purpose than he was when he set out.

Vexed, dispirited, and his heart heavy with dread, he, according to the arrangement he had made, retraced his steps to the old inn in Drury-lane, where he knew Jack would be waiting with such nervous impatience to know the result of his search.

To hope to find any one by your own individual exertions when they have been lost in London, is a task so hopeless as to make it not worth while to use an effort, as it could only result in bitter disappointment.

So soon as Jack heard his comrade ascending the stairs, he could tell by his heavy and listless tread that he had been unsuccessful.

The discovery, although he had schooled himself to bear it, almost drove him frantic.

"You have not found her?" he said.

"I have not," replied his friend, "but do not despair of doing so. Come, are you ready?"

"Quite," said Jack. "Anything to get clear of this place, which grows more hateful to me every moment."

"You have put on your disguise?"

"Yes, and as soon as we leave this dark chamber you will see how great a difference it has made to me."

"So much the better. Let me go down first, and if in a minute or two I do not return, follow me; you will understand by that the coast is clear."

So saying, Blueskin left Jack, and descended to the ground floor.

There was no one in the kitchen, but in the front room a goodly number were assembled; that is, if the noise they made could be taken as a guide.

When Jack descended, and Blueskin saw him by the bright light there was in the room, prepared as he was for an alteration, he could scarcely credit his eyes.

For some time lately, what with one thing and another, Jack had had no time to pay any particular attention to his toilette, and the apparel he wore was in a very neglected condition. In fact, he had begun to look very much like a scarecrow.

Now, however, he had taken the utmost pains with himself.

His face and hands were scrupulously clean, and his short crop of hair brushed closely to his head.

Slimly and genteely built as Jack was, when properly dressed he had every appearance of a gentleman, unless the lineaments of his countenance were closely scanned.

Then an expression of low cunning was perceivable, which marred the effect of all.

Very little time, however, was spent by Blueskin in making remarks upon his looks. The first surprise over, he at once made his way to the front door.

Johnson was standing on the doorstep.

He had taken up that position in order to ascertain whether there were any officers lurking about the neighbourhood.

But all appeared to present much the same aspect as usual, and this he communicated to the two friends.

"We will be off at once, then," said Blueskin. "My first place will be the livery stables in Long-acre, where I shall hire a couple of nags, and you may expect us back when you see us, for there is no knowing how events may turn out."

"All right. I trust you will succeed in finding Bess, bless her heart. If she should come here, I shall take good care of her, you may depend."

"Do so—do so. I need not tell you that you may rely upon our gratitude."

"I know that well enough. Take care, and I hope you will soon succeed."

With these words in their ears Blueskin and Jack took their way in rather a circuitous fashion through the courts to the livery stable at the corner of Charles-street, Long-acre, already well known to the reader.

Here they were provided with a couple of steeds of excellent quality.

They were equipped with an especial view to the service they were to go upon.

Holsters were affixed to each of the saddles, and in them were two brace of carefully-loaded double-barrelled pistols.

Ammunition, too, was handed to each of them by the man in attendance, as well as a brace of smaller pistols, suitable to the pocket.

Thus provided, they were in a position to cry, "Stand and deliver" successfully to any travellers they might encounter upon the highway.

Blueskin led the way, and trotted at a gentle pace through the city in the direction of Blackfriars-bridge.

Their appearance was unexceptionable to a degree, and such as would have at once commanded respect from the beholder.

Most certainly no suspicion that they were "knights of the road," and setting out upon a night excursion, would be engendered.

"We will make our way over Blackfriars-bridge, Jack," said Blueskin, "and straight on to the Kent-road. It is one that is much travelled by people who are worth crying stand to. What do you say?"

"I leave the expedition in your hands," replied Jack. "Be you the leader, I will follow you."

"I don't so much care about that," replied Blueskin.

"I would rather have some one with me in an affair of this sort, that I could consult with than a mere machine to obey orders."

"You are old enough to assume the command."

"That may be, Jack, but I don't wish to do it. You may not know it, but the day is not far distant when you will grow famous, and make for yourself such a name and reputation as no one ever yet had and ever will have again, and it is you that will be the captain."

Jack smiled.

One of his greatest weaknesses was his vanity and love of flattery, and, such being the case, it is easy to imagine the effect Blueskin's words had upon him, though that he was perfectly sincere when he uttered them there can be no doubt.

"And now, Jack," he added, "nothing but a pressing need of money would have brought me out to-night, and diverted me from the pursuit of Edgworth Bess. Therefore, we will be content to return as soon as we make anything like a booty."

"That, of course, meets with my approval," said Jack, "for it is the subject of all others which is uppermost in my mind."

"Do not despair. We have every room to hope, and perhaps chance may suddenly and unexpectedly place the clue in our hands."

"I trust so," said Jack, as they pulled up at the toll-gate while the man opened it. "The sooner the better!"

CHAPTER CIV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN MEET WITH A VERY SINGULAR ADVENTURE ON THE KENT-ROAD.

A SHARP canter of about ten minutes duration sufficed to carry them quite out into the open country.

The place they reached, however, is now as much like a town as any other part of London is, but the buildings are comparatively recent, and there must be many now alive who can distinctly recollect their erection.

A beautiful silence was about the spot.

The rustling of the tree-tops, and the cries of those birds whose habits are nocturnal, sounded like pleasing music in Jack's ears.

The trees on either side of the roadway grew up so high, and were planted so thickly together, that they cast a shadow so black as to make it look like some wild cavernous recess.

It was here that Blueskin drew up.

"There is no place for miles so favourable for our purpose as this is. Se we will stay here. Halt!"

Jack stopped.

"Keep your horse as quiet as you can. We shall be sure not to have to wait long before we hear some one coming."

The friends now backed their horses as far as they could into the shade and waited.

Advantage was taken of this opportunity to look to the priming of their pistols, for then, when the percussion cap was unknown, they required constant attention.

On this occasion, Jack perceived that the jolting in riding had shaken the powder out of the pans of the brace he carried in his coat-pocket, so that had he relied upon them in any emergency they would have failed him.

This, however, he soon remedied, and then he waited with considerable impatience to hear some one approach.

For a long time their patience was unrewarded.

No one came.

At last, Jack grew quite tired, and would have moved, but, just at that moment, Blueskin held up his hand in an attitude for silence.

"What is it?" asked Jack, in a whisper.

"Silence for a moment, while I listen. I heard very faintly the beat of horses' hoofs."

Jack strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, and then found he was just able to catch a sound, which certainly seemed to be what his comrade said it was.

"It is at an immense distance, and your ears must have been uncommonly acute for them to have distinguished it so soon."

"Sharp sense of hearing," replied Blueskin, "is an essential requisite for every true knight of the road, and it is a faculty you should cultivate to the utmost. Hark, again."

Jack did so, and this time the clattering of iron-bound hoofs upon the hard road reached him more unequivocally.

"There are two of them," continued Blueskin, "and they are coming at a slashing pace. Draw more on one side and listen. Be on the look out when they approach, and as soon as I give the signal pounce out upon them, and, in as loud and stern a voice as you can assume, command them to deliver their money or their lives. Now, silence till they come."

Both drew now as close to the hedgerow as they possibly could, and it would have needed a very sharp eye to have distinguished them from the different objects by which they were surrounded.

But now a circumstance occurred which tended to change the current of Blake's intentions.

As the beating of the horses' feet became more perceptible, he heard mingled with it those of other horses, as well as the grinding of wheels.

This seemed to point out that those whose approach he had first heard were merely outriders.

If this was so, his prey would be in the interior of the carriage.

A few minutes though, he felt, would set all at rest, and he would be prepared to act either way.

He deemed it no more than prudent, though, to let Jack know by a hasty whisper what he suspected.

At that time it was by no means an unusual thing for people to travel with an escort, for the roads were most unsafe.

Only those, however, who occupied high positions in the social scale, or who carried about with them valuable articles were thus attended, for it very materially increased the expenses of the journey.

The risk of stopping such travellers would, of course, be very great, but then the booty to be acquired would make it worth their while.

It was from the direction of London that the sounds came.

The outriders, for such they were, reached the dark bit of road where our friends lay in ambush.

They were talking together in a loud voice, but they swept by too quickly for them to catch the purport of their words.

Blueskin made not the least attempt to molest them.

He would have gained nothing by it.

They were doubtless galloping on to reach the next

town where relays could be had, for there was every indication that it was an express journey.

Just as they passed, the lamps of the carriage came in sight.

At first they looked like two twin tiny stars in the intense darkness.

As they grew nearer, their size and brilliancy rapidly increased until the trees by the roadside could be distinguished.

"Now, Jack," whispered Blueskin, "prepare yourself for a desperate resistance."

"Do you expect it?"

"It is best to be prepared in case."

Jack gathered the reins firmly in his left hand, and grasped one of the holster pistols in his right, setting his teeth hard at the same time.

It was the first adventure on the highway that he had ever had, and he naturally felt a little nervous and excited.

Blueskin, however, was cool and prepared. He was an old hand at the business.

He was able to perceive, though Jack was not, that the approaching vehicle was a post-chaise, drawn by four horses, and having two postilions.

The speed they were coming at was something frightful. Indeed, he half thought the horses had taken fright and run away.

And, indeed, the only thing which seemed to convince him that such was not the case was, that above all other sounds, he could hear the loud cracking of the postilions' whips, as they strove to urge the cattle to make still greater speed.

What to think of this headlong haste he knew not, but it must have been something of no ordinary import to make them run the gauntlet, as they did, of the perils of the road.

But why they travelled post was a thing that Blueskin did not choose to trouble his head about. He resolved to stop them, be the consequences what they might. All he hoped was that he would obtain booty sufficient to repay him for his trouble.

When the two leading horses in the post-chaise were on a level with him, Blueskin gave the word to Jack, and then giving his own steed a sudden impulse forward, caught hold of the rear one by the bridle.

At the same moment he cried out to halt, and fired his pistol so close to the postilion's head, that he rolled off his horse into the road, firmly persuaded that he was hit.

But not heeding his cries, Blueskin tightened the hold he had upon the bridle, and forced the horses round until the post-chaise was turned quite across the road, and in such a position that further progress was impossible.

The horses kicked and plunged violently, but Blake called out to Jack to cut the traces, which he immediately did by the aid of the sword which he wore, and the liberated horses dashed off along the road as though possessed by demons.

So quickly, too, was all this performed, that the inmates of the chaise had not time to recover from their surprise.

But just as Blueskin reached the door, the window was let down with a sudden crash, and a man asked, with an oath, what was the matter.

"Guard the door there, Jack!" cried Blueskin, in such loud tones as to immediately arrest attention. "You, my men, be on the watch, and be prepared to fire the moment I give the word."

"Murder!" said the voice at the carriage window, as he drew in his head. "Murder!"

"You may rely upon it it will be without you comply with my demands, and that at once. Your money, watches, rings, and whatever other valuables you may have with you. You will find it best not to delay."

He rode quite close to the window of the post-chaise as he spoke, and, resting the barrel of his pistol upon the ledge of it, bent his head and took as good a look as he could at the interior.

But even as he did so, his ears caught the sound of the approach of some other vehicle from the direction of London.

This warned him to be speedy.

The inmates of the chaise were an elderly man and a female, who, as far as could be judged by her general appearance and contour, was by no means so old.



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ARE SPECTATORS OF A STRANGE DUEL.]

Indeed, at first sight, she looked little more than a mere girl, but that was owing to her peculiar style of beauty, which, in its character, was child-like in the extreme.

She was, however, in a state of the greatest possible terror and agitation, and the alarm depicted upon her countenance was certainly too great for Blueskin's attack to be the sole cause of it.

"Help—help! Mercy!" she cried. "Oh! Charles! Charles! what shall we do?"

These ejaculations filled Blueskin with still greater astonishment, but before he could repeat his demand, the girl continued with greater vehemence and fright—

"Hark—hark! Charles, she comes! Cannot you hear the wheels? Oh! we are lost—lost!"

"Yes, curse her!" growled the elderly man, who had been addressed by the name of Charles; and then he added a few more imprecatory sentences, which we think unnecessary to repeat.

Blueskin interrupted him.

He, too, could hear rather more plainly than he wished the sounds of some four-wheeled vehicle coming along the road from London at a furious pace.

"Quick!" he said. "I am not in the habit of asking twice for what I want. You have dallied long enough. Quick! I say. Hand over your valuables, or the consequences!"

"Cannot be worse or more terrible than they already are," interrupted the young girl. "Wretched man, you have ruined us!"

"Ruined you? How?" exclaimed Blueskin, who found himself every moment more unable to understand what was taking place.

"Silence, Susanna!" said the elderly man, and who, in future, we shall, to save trouble, do as the girl did, and call Charles. "Things now have come to a crisis. Through this unfortunate accident, a meeting will be impossible to be avoided, and we must face the matter out as well as we are able."

CHAPTER CV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE POST-CHAISE BEGINS TO UNFOLD ITSELF.

THERE was one person present who listened to what was going forward with even more curiosity, interest, and bewilderment than even Blueskin did.

That person was Jack Sheppard.

It will be recollected that, in obedience to his comrade's injunctions, he had taken up his position at the other window of the post-chaise, so as to be at hand to prevent either of its occupants leaving it.

Of course, where he was, he could hear every word that was spoken with the greatest plainness.

But what he had heard so far only served to make him feel the keenest desire to know something more of the affair that at present seemed so mysterious and incomprehensible.

That he would have this desire gratified, appeared highly probable.

From what the girl Susanna had said, he gathered they were pursued, and that it was a female who was pursuing them.

And that this female, whom they appeared so much to dread, was the occupant of the carriage that was coming along at such a rate there was every reason to suppose.

If so, it would reach the spot upon which they stood in the course of a few minutes.

Then, surely, he would know more.

With his eyes turned in the direction of London, he watched its coming.

In the darkness and distance its outlines were dimly distinguishable.

As he gazed with straining eyes upon it, something seemed to tell him that he was about to witness a strange episode in the great drama of human life.

Leaving him, however, with his attention more directed to the road before him than the chaise window, where it ought to be, we will return to Blueskin, who had determined, at all hazards, to take his booty before the other vehicle arrived.

Accordingly he assumed a threatening manner, and, clicking the lock of his pistol, he said—

"Do not drive me to extremities! I have had patience with you so far, but I bid you beware of delaying too long. Do you value your life?"

"My life?"

"Yes, your life. Do not repeat my words."

"I do not value it," said Charles, "for it is as good as lost already. Kill me!"

"No—no!" shrieked Susanna, and, springing forward, she twined her arms around his neck, interposing her body between them. "Spare him, and I will give you all we have. Wretched man! you little think the amount of mischief you have caused by interrupting our flight!"

"Then you are fugitives," said Blueskin. "From justice, perhaps, and so I have done a good turn, I suppose, to those who will not thank me for it. Never mind. Once more, I say, give me all you have of any value, or I will take it by force; and I warn you beforehand, if you drive me to such a course, I shall not be over gentle when I set about it!"

Upon hearing these words, spoken as they were in a tone of the greatest determination, Charles, at the entreaties of Susanna, took from his fob a large gold watch, richly chased and jewelled, from which depended a long chain and a bunch of massive gold seals.

But Blueskin was not satisfied with this. It was cash he wanted, and cash he determined to have.

"This is not enough," he said. "Quick, your purses, rings, and other jewellery! Make haste, for your lives!"

Trembling all over with intense terror, with hot tears streaming down her cheeks, Susanna, one after another, produced the various articles which had been named, and handed them out of the chaise window.

Hastily placing them in his pocket, Blueskin would have made off, but at that moment, with a sudden dash, the pursuing vehicle arrived upon the scene of action.

Still more audible and horrible became the curses which issued from Charles's lips.

Still more piercing became the shrieks of his companion.

Then, before the pestilions had fairly brought their

foaming horses to a standstill, the door of the carriage which had just arrived was thrown open.

A female form came forth.

Blueskin drew aside, but did not attempt to fly. He felt a sudden and uncontrollable desire to know more of the inmates of the two vehicles.

He looked on attentively.

In a moment or so he was rejoined by Jack, who said—

"What's the meaning of all this, Blue?"

"I cannot imagine."

"Nor I."

"It is very strange."

"Very. What shall we do?"

"Remain where we are a little while."

"With all my heart! but will it be safe?"

"Quite! There is nothing to fear. We are more than a match for any now present, and we can easily give our horses the spur if we hear sounds indicative of the arrival of any one."

"All right!"

This little dialogue was carried on with the greatest rapidity, but, having come to this understanding, both set themselves to the task of watching what course events would now take.

The female who had alighted in so hurried a manner was tall, and a large travelling cloak which she wore could not conceal her really fine proportions.

With the speed of passion she ran along the roadway to the door of the post-chaise.

A loud scream burst from Susanna's lips as she witnessed her approach, and, cowering down in the farthest corner of the vehicle, strove to hide herself from view.

"Wretch!" cried the woman, fiercely, and in a manner which sounded as though she had spoken through her clenched teeth. "You thought to escape me, but, behold, a fortunate chance has placed you in my hands!"

As she spoke, she unclasped her cloak about her neck, and allowed it to fall upon the ground behind her, in a heap.

"Let me get at her!" she cried furiously. "She shall live to repent this day, and you, too, villain, unworthy of the form you wear!"

It was Charles who was thus addressed, and his terror seemed scarcely less than that of the young girl beside him.

There was light enough for Blueskin and Jack to see that the apparel which this strange woman wore was of the best material, and doubtless it was under the domination of blind rage that she spoke and acted in the manner she did.

Springing up on to the step, she had the door of the chaise open in an instant.

"Come forth!" she shrieked. "Come forth, or I will make you! I will drag you forth! Do you hear me? Come forth, I say!"

"Now, Julia," said Charles. "Do not be violent, I"—

The extraordinary female, named Julia did not allow the unlucky Charles to finish his sentence, for with the sudden fury of a wild animal, she jumped into the chaise, and, catching hold of him by the hair of his head, drew him out into the road.

So rapidly and dexterously was the feat performed that neither Jack nor Blueskin would have had time to interfere, had they possessed the greatest inclination to do so, which, if the truth was told, they certainly had not. They had already learned the wisdom of remaining neuter in other people's quarrels.

Charles sat on the ground in a very rueful manner indeed.

He did not venture to move, but he turned his head in the direction of our friends, and implored their aid in the most abject terms.

The scene was ludicrous enough, in all conscience, and yet it was all the more horrible on that account.

The woman Julia looked in a moment to see who it was from whom he asked succour.

She saw dimly the figures of two men on horseback.

"Help!" she said. "If you are gentlemen, if you have a consciousness of what is right and wrong, if you are willing to assist a woman to avenge herself for the injuries which she has received, I implore you to aid me."

"What do you wish us to do?" asked Blueskin, who, strangely enough, felt more sympathy for this woman,

violent—as she was, than he did for either Susanna or Charles.

"I will tell you," she said, struggling to appear as calm as she could. "Come nearer, so that you can hear me better."

They obeyed.

"When you hear what I have to relate to you," she continued, "I feel sure that you will take part with me. In the first place, that is my husband!"

As she said *that*, which she did in a most contemptuous manner, she pointed to Charles.

Our friends waited in silence for her to continue.

"I feel almost ashamed to confess it, but I have loved that man—I am afraid I still do love him. Time was when he was worthier than he is now, and returned my affection. But there came into our house that hussy who sits yonder. She was perishing from want and cold. I took her in, even as the man in the fable took the viper. Like the viper, she turned against me. She showed her gratitude by practising innumerable arts to win my husband from me. Not that she loved him, but because he was rich and could indulge her in every species of extravagance. She succeeded in ensnaring him, and from that time happiness and myself have been strangers. Day after day I saw him sinking still deeper and deeper into difficulties. She was the cause. At length it came to my ears that he was about to raise all the money he possibly could, and then fly with his mistress to the continent, leaving me to misery and poverty, and to fight my way through the world as best I could."

CHAPTER CVI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD WITNESS A SINGULAR DUEL.

THE outraged wife paused a moment for breath, but it was only for a moment.

Then she went on.

"As soon as I discovered this, I set out in pursuit of them, determined to punish her with my own hand. The laws will allow me no redress, so I am driven to do so, for I will never allow her to go free. By what means their flight has been arrested I know not, nor do I care. I rejoice at the chance, whatever it may be, which has placed her so completely in my power. And so I call upon you both to render me what assistance I may require. Will you do so?"

"We will!" said Blueskin; "I don't like to interfere in other people's quarrels, but, under the circumstances, I think they fully deserve some retribution at your hands!"

"They do."

"What must we do?"

"Allow me to be uninterrupted."

"In what way?"

"Hold my husband here, and keep him from interposing between his minion and myself."

"Agreed! We'll manage that. Lay hold, Jack!"

As he spoke, Blueskin suddenly bent down in the saddle, and caught the unfortunate husband by the collar of his coat, and being a powerful man, he, by exerting all his strength, pulled him to his feet.

Jack then caught hold of him on the other side, and so, between the two, he was held there in a perfectly helpless condition.

No sooner did she see that her husband was perfectly secure than, with great speed, she ran back to her own carriage.

But she was back again in a moment.

In her hands she carried two long glittering rapiers.

Matters began to assume a serious aspect.

What was she going to do with those weapons?

They soon saw.

"Choose!" she cried, in a high-strained tone of voice, as she went to the post-chaise in which Susanna still sat, though half-dead with fright. "Choose! Will you remain there and be slain, or come forth and have a chance of your life!"

"Mercy! mercy!" shrieked Susanna. "Save me, oh! save me from this dreadful woman. Help, help!"

"Choose!" said Julia. "I shall not ask again. Will you come forth?"

"Yes, yes! Have mercy upon me, and I will do all that you ask! Mercy! mercy!"

With screams and tears and sighs, and wild cries for help, Susanna alighted from the post-chaise.

But she sank down immediately upon the ground.

Then Julia took one of the swords, and laid it down by the side of her rival.

The other she grasped firmly in her own hand, and held in a posture of attack.

"Take up that sword," she cried, "and defend yourself! I give you that chance of your life! Take it up, I say, or, so surely as there is a heaven above us, I will slay you as you are!"

Blueskin could not help feeling a great amount of admiration for this singular being, who in so masculine and self-reliant a manner set about the redressment of her wrongs.

To be sure a great deal of exception can be taken to what she did, but then there was every excuse for her, for people under the domination of a powerful rage will do what, under less exciting circumstances, they would never dream of doing.

That she felt the injury which had been done her most keenly there can be no doubt, and she happened to possess sufficient spirit to take the affair into her own hands.

The girl Susanna shrunk and trembled when she saw these terrible preparations on the part of the justly-incensed wife.

She did not attempt to take the weapon which had been put within the hilt so conveniently to her grasp, but seemed to try to shrink down into the earth.

An expression of contemptuous disdain was upon Julia's face as she turned towards Blueskin and Jack, and spoke.

"Let me intreat you," she said, "to leave this guilty coward in my hands. Will you promise me that you will not interfere, but stand and see fair play between us?"

"We will," replied Blueskin.

"And my husband," she added, as that individual made a desperate but unsuccessful effort to get free, "keep him as well from interfering with us."

"Don't be afraid," returned Blueskin.

"And you," continued Julia (who became calmer every moment), as she turned to the postilions, "will find it your best policy to remain neuter."

Things were now coming to a climax.

The greatest violence of her passion, now that she saw her victim fully in her power, abated, but it left behind a cold-blooded feeling of determined revenge.

With the manner of one who was by no means a stranger to the use of the rapier, she held hers in her hand, and pointed it at the breast of her rival.

"Rise, hussy," she said; "I will give you a chance of your worthless life. Rise and defend yourself with the weapon at your side, or, if you do not, I will, as surely as there is a sky above us, slay you where you are."

Up to this moment Susanna seemed to be overcome with the most abject terror, but now a sudden and remarkable alteration took place.

It was the courage of desperation.

She was, indeed, like one of those wild animals who, as long as they are able, will fly from danger, but who at the last, when forced at bay, will turn round and defend themselves.

Uttering, then, a scream of rage, she, by a sudden movement of her arm, took hold of the rapier.

She rose to her feet, and, with great speed, threw off her hat and cloak, in order that they might not encumber her.

"Now," she cried, "you have forced this quarrel on me. I avoided it as long as I could, but now that you have forced me to it, woe be to you!"

And no sooner had she spoken the words than, shortening her arm, she made a furious lunge at her adversary.

It was parried, though somewhat unskillfully.

A terrible and vindictive earnestness was now apparent in the eyes of both women.

It was, as they knew well, a life and death conflict.

The glittering blades twisted and twirled about in every imaginable shape.

Then a slight scream was heard.

Susanna felt the point of her opponent's weapon enter her left arm.

The wound was a trifling one—a mere puncture, in fact

—and so far from causing her to shrink, it seemed to endow her with fresh vigour.

Again the swords clashed.

Susanna bent all her energies to attack, and, to tell truth, Julia had much ado to defend herself.

She allowed no sound to escape her lips, but she felt more than once that she was wounded.

Indeed, as it now turned out, they appeared to be pretty equally matched.

It would be hard to say what were the precise feelings of Blueskin and Sheppard as they witnessed this singular combat.

They could not help thinking that the wife was in the right, so far as their own notions went, but still they did not for all that exactly like the idea of two females engaging in a duel of so deadly a character.

But they had given their words not to interfere, and so they resolved to keep to what they had said.

As for the husband—the unworthy wretch who had been the cause of all this—from the moment the contest fairly commenced, he ceased to struggle to get free, but looked on with a strange kind of fascination.

The movements of the combatants now became so rapid, that in the darkness they could with the greatest difficulty be distinguished.

Round and round, backwards and forwards, to the right, to the left, leaving, whichever direction they took, a track of blood as they went.

Still neither seemed to be seriously or dangerously hurt.

Presently, however, there was one horrible scream of anguish, followed almost instantly by another.

The weapons clashed more feebly.

Then Susanna's arm failed her.

She staggered, and almost fell.

In an instant Julia took advantage of it.

With a cry of triumph, which the pain she was suffering almost converted into a groan, she ran her rival through the body.

The keen point of the rapier entered her breast, and such was the vigour of the thrust that the hilt struck with a dull sound against the part where the point had entered.

Susanna fell.

A gleam of ferocious joy shot from the eyes of Julia.

She tried to move—to speak.

But utterance and motion were denied her.

With a deadly feeling of sickness, a sensation as though the world was gliding from her, she fell to the earth, bleeding from innumerable wounds.

There was a momentary stillness.

No one present had anticipated such a sanguinary termination to the duel.

Blueskin was the first to recover himself.

Relaxing his hold upon the husband's collar, he dismounted with great rapidity from his steed, and ran to where the two women lay.

He was immediately followed by Jack and the postilions, who had looked upon the whole scene with the greatest wonder and alarm.

Susanna was nearest to him, so it was over her that Blueskin first stooped.

Kneeling down, he raised her head carefully.

A groan of terrible anguish came from her lips, and he was obliged to return her to her former position.

"It is all over with her, I fear. She cannot possibly survive. I hope the other has escaped better."

With tottering steps, the husband approached the spot.

What his feelings were no one knew, but he stooped down over Susanna, and groaned aloud.

CHAPTER XVII.

BLUESKIN UNFORTUNATELY TAKES JACK SHEPPARD'S ADVICE.

At that moment, perhaps, there pressed upon his mind with full force the consequences which his own actions had entailed.

It was all his work, although, of course, had he been permitted, he would have endeavoured to prevent matters going to the extreme length they had.

Some fondness for this man must have had a home in Susanna's heart, for when she found who it was that was bending over her, she, despite the frightful pain the action

occasioned her, raised her arms and twined them about his neck.

But it was only for an instant.

She could not possibly have long survived that ghastly wound in her chest, but the term of life that remained to her was shortened sensibly by taking that last embrace.

Once, and only once did she draw him towards herself, and then, with a low moan of anguish, she fell back dead!

In the meantime Blueskin had hastened to the other combatant, who was known to him only by her Christian name, Julia.

Her condition was bad, indeed, but not so desperate as her rival's.

"A surgeon ought to be had here at once," said Blueskin. Then, turning to the terrified postilions, he added, "Ride one of you to the nearest town, and bring one here without delay."

Jack Sheppard knelt down by the head of the injured wife, and with his hands gently put back her hair, which was streaming over her face.

As he did so, his ears caught a faint sound coming from her lips.

Still lower he bent his head and listened.

"A surgeon! a surgeon!" she said. "Quick! fetch one, or I die!"

"All is well," said Jack, soothingly, "the postilions have departed in search of one."

At this moment her husband approached.

His appearance was grief-stricken in the extreme.

"We will leave you," said Blueskin, "to your own thoughts. Should both of these be brought to death, you will be morally their murderer. Now, Jack, mount, and let us be off."

Charles, the husband, said not a word in reply to Blueskin. It is questionable, indeed, if he understood the purport of his speech.

In obedience to his comrade's words, Jack left his position at the woman's head, and went towards the horses.

"We had best be off at once," said Blueskin, "before others arrive; and we have got no time to lose, for look, some one is coming now."

"There is. Which way shall we go?"

"Back to London."

"Agreed."

A sharp application of the spurs made the horses set forward at a good gallop.

For some moments not a word was said, but when they drew in a little, and were beyond all signs or sounds of human beings, Jack said—

"Well, Blue, this has been my first adventure on the road. Heaven knows it has been a strange one!"

"You are right."

"It is an incident that would furnish material for much thought."

"No one knows," said Blueskin, "how many little domestic tragedies are daily enacted. You see we have come across one of them."

"And about one of the strangest, I should think."

"Does it appear so to you?"

"Yes."

"And you have the clue to the whole affair. Now, how incomprehensible it will appear to those who will arrive upon the scene!"

"True."

"Altogether, I am much vexed at it."

"Why?"

"Because it cannot fail to be productive of trouble to us."

"In what way?"

"We have allowed several persons to see us distinctly, and for a long enough time for them to be able to give a minute and accurate description of us."

"Very true."

"The little episode we have witnessed to-night will attract a great deal of attention among all classes, and the utmost pains will be taken to apprehend us, not merely for the sake of the robbery, but because we are mixed up in it, and may be supposed in a position to explain things."

"But there is the husband."

"He will be careful what he says, you may depend. He will have no desire to criminate himself."

"But the postilions?"

"They know something of the affair, it is true, but for all that we shall be looked close after. Now, I am vexed all the more about that in consequence of the pains I have taken to disguise myself."

"Now you will have to find another."

"I know I shall, but ten to one if I find one so good."

"Why not return to your proper character?"

"Jonathan Wild."

"What of him? Sooner or later he must learn the secret of your return to life, and I do not see what object you would gain in keeping it from him."

"Nor I, now. Of course you know why I assumed it?"

"I do," said Jack; "it was to seek for Bess. In the strange events which have just happened I lost sight of her for a moment. Oh! Blake, tell me where I am to look to find her!"

"Alas! I know not. However, we are in a better position to make our inquiries than we were."

"How much have you taken?"

"I cannot tell."

"Look."

"It is pretty fair. It will be best to defer till we reach London."

"But where do you propose to go? What steps do you intend to take?"

"I am at a loss to say. I did not think when I spoke. We shall have to be very careful, or you will be made a prisoner."

"What shall we do? Where shall we turn?"

"I can tell no better than yourself. She has disappeared, and left not the slightest clue by which she may be traced."

"Do give me hope."

"Certainly! We must set to work, and think into whose hands she is most likely to have fallen."

"Lord Donnull's?"

"Possibly, or into those of some other of Jonathan Wild's agents."

"I am perplexed," said Jack; "but from this moment I will take an oath to do nothing, have nothing in view but her discovery. Towards that end I shall turn all my thoughts and actions. It remains for you to say whether you will aid me."

"You know I will, Jack; my motive may not be quite so powerful a one as yours, but it is nearly."

Jack grasped his comrade's hand. It was all he could do towards expressing his thanks.

"And now you bring me back to my first question, what shall we do?"

"One moment," said Blueskin.

"What is it?"

"Listen."

"I do."

"Can you hear nothing?"

"Now I can. It is the grinding of wheels."

"Yes, some other vehicle is approaching us. Look, there are the lamps."

"I see them!"

"Draw aside, Jack."

"No!"

"No! why not?"

"Did you think of stopping it?"

"Certainly; we cannot get too much booty."

"My friend, we have sufficient for our immediate wants—let that suffice."

"I do not see any reason for letting this go by."

"You may not, but Blake, my friend, I want to devote the whole of my energies to the task of finding Edgworth Bess. Let all other things be forgotten, or unheeded. Will you promise me this?"

"I will if you wish it, though I don't see why our stopping the carriage, or whatever it is that is coming, should interfere with that task in any way."

"Do you not?"

"I do not, but still I am willing to give way to you. We are under no necessity that I know of. But when you come out upon the road, you should do all you can and then be off."

"We have already done enough."

"A little more, then, won't make much difference."

"Be guided by me. Let this pass by unmolested."

"I consent."

"I am glad of that. The same good luck we have hitherto had may desert us, and should either of us be captured, wounded, or killed, there would be an end to all."

"Do not be timid. But I can tell you are apprehensive, and so on that very account, it will, I daresay, be best to avoid the encounter."

"I am sure."

"But for all that I think it would be better for us to draw up under the shadow of the hedge and let it pass."

"I see no reason why we should court observation."

"It will be prudent to avoid it."

"There seems to be a lane just a little further on, on your left hand."

"It looks as if there was."

"We will ride forward and see. If it should turn out that we are right, we will back our horses into it and there wait while it passes."

A dozen steps brought them to the place in question, which, as they had fully expected, proved to be a lane.

They had just time to walk their horses a pace or two into it and turn round, when the carriage arrived.

It was going at full speed.

Perhaps it was only natural that both Jack and Blueskin should look upon the approaching vehicle with more than common curiosity, but, whether it was or not, they did so. On it came like a huge cloud.

It swept past the top of the lane with great velocity.

As it did so, however, a terrific and bewildering scream reached their ears—so loud, so shrill, so piercing, that it was distinctly heard above the trampling of the horses and the rumbling of the wheels.

CHAPTER CVIII.

OUR TWO FRIENDS MEET RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY WITH JONATHAN WILD ON BLACKFRIAR'S-BRIDGE.

"WHAT does that mean?" asked Jack, as soon as he sufficiently recovered the shock of the surprise to speak.

"What does that mean, eh, Blue?"

"I no more know than you do. It was some one in the carriage."

"Beyond all doubt."

"And a female!"

"What a rate they are going at, to be sure. Why they are almost out of sight."

"Yes; they have increased their speed, I think."

"And the girl—I am sure it was a girl."

"So am I."

"Why did she shriek out so dreadfully?"

"Heaven only knows. Perhaps she was being carried off by force."

"But, then, if it was against her will, you would think her abductors would take care that she gave utterance to no such cry as that, which would be the means of calling immediate attention to them."

"That may be, but it is just possible those means may not have been sufficient, or that she may have taken advantage of some unexpected circumstance."

"There was but one cry."

"Only one, and that one seemed as though it had been stopped suddenly."

"It is very strange."

"You may well think that. There is only one thing I regret."

"What is that?"

"That I did not refuse your request, and carry out my original intention of stopping the carriage."

"But think what fresh difficulties we might have got into."

"I do; but you ought to think, as well, that we might have been the means of getting some one out of one."

Alas! Blueskin little thought how perfectly right he was, and how materially the whole aspect of affairs would have been changed if he had stopped the carriage.

But fate, destiny, providence, or whatever name you may choose to call mysterious chance, had decreed otherwise.

Had he have stopped the carriage, much future misery would have been averted.

Perhaps the reader already guesses who was the inmate of the carriage.

It was Edgworth Bess.

By what strange succession of events she became so, we have yet to relate.

The doings of others have compelled us to leave her for some time, but ere long we shall be able, for a period, to devote ourselves exclusively to her strange fortunes.

Little did Jack think, as the carriage whirled by, and the shriek smote upon his ear, that she of whom he was in search was so close to him, and in greater peril than she had ever been before, or that that awful heart-bursting scream came from her lips.

Little did he think what he had missed by not acting in accordance with Blueskin's wishes.

The sounds of the receding vehicle died away into the silence of the night.

It was not until it had fairly done so that the two friends moved.

The discontinuance of the sound to which they had been listening seemed to have the effect of breaking the kind of spell that was upon them.

"It's very strange," said Blueskin, as he walked his horse out of the lane into the middle of the high-road, and there halted. "I don't feel at all at ease. I have half a mind now to gallop after it."

"Nonsense!" replied Jack, "that can do no good. Besides, they have got too good a start for us to hope to overtake them in anything like a reasonable distance, to say nothing of the danger of revisiting the spot where the duel took place."

"Well—well! I suppose we must go back to London now."

"That is it," said Jack; "but let us go slowly, so that we can talk. Where shall we go to in London?"

"It will not do to go to the "Black Lion."

"By no means!"

"I think I can manage now. Do you know Gilbert's passage?"

"Whereabouts is it?"

"At the back of Clare-market."

"I know it very well; but you do not think of going there, do you?"

"Why not?"

"It is so close to Drury-lane!"

"So much the better!"

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure! We shall be less likely to be suspected there!"

"As you will!"

"If you agree to that, the best thing we can do now is to make our way there direct, for it will be daylight by the time we arrive."

"What then?"

"We must lie by during the day, and as soon as it is dark, we must sally out and try if we cannot be successful in finding some trace of the missing girl."

"I shall not know what rest is until we find her!"

"I can understand your anxiety, but, Jack, you ought to remember that, unless you are careful to preserve your own powers, you will fall an easy prey into the hands of your enemies."

"True—true!"

"Get all the rest you can!"

"But when we start out, what course shall we adopt?"

"That it would be hard to say until the time comes. During the next twelve hours or so, something may turn up to give us the clue we want!"

"I trust there may!"

"And so do I?"

"Have you any hopes of such a thing?"

"No particular hope, but still it is probable such a thing might happen."

"But suppose the day should pass away and night come, and find us in the same state as we are now, what should you do?"

"What should you?"

"I know not, hardly."

"There is but one plan that I can think of."

"And what is that?"

"We have tolerable evidence that she reached Warwick-lane."

"We have that she reached Newgate-market."

"Well, that is much the same thing. It next remains

to consider, upon finding herself there, what direction would she be likely to take."

"There it is! For my own part, I think it most likely that she was in such a state of mental agitation and confusion, that she would take the first course that came."

"There is a strong probability of that, but no more than that the "Black Lion" rose before her mind, and that she made the best of her way there."

"But she never reached it."

"I know that, but it does not follow that she did not set out with the intention of doing so. She may have been intercepted. You must know, as well as I do, that it is by no means safe for a girl to pass through London streets alone at such an hour."

"I do know it—I do know it, and when I think of the fearful dangers she would likely enough encounter, my heart grows sick within me!"

"Cheer up. All may not be so bad as you anticipate. She may have fallen into good hands."

"She may, but I fear she has not."

"Why?"

"Because, if she had, she would have sent word to the 'Black Lion,' knowing how uneasy I should be on her account. No, my friend; you cannot cheat me with that hope."

"I would fain do so. Let us return to our search."

"We will assume, then, first of all that she started for the 'Black Lion.'"

"Well?"

"To reach it she would doubtless take the main thoroughfares."

"Ludgate-hill, Fleet-street, and the Strand."

"Just so. We will then, step by step, go the whole of the distance, taking that route, and on our way make every inquiry we possibly can. If she has gone that way we shall assuredly hear some tidings of her."

"Oh! you fill me with joy! Let us make the attempt at once."

"Not so, and for many reasons. In the first place, it would be in the highest degree unsafe for you to show yourself by daylight; and, in the second, as it was night when she went, it naturally follows that night is the most proper time for us to set about making our inquiries."

"So it does."

"Keep yourself as calm and cool all the day as you possibly can. When night comes, I trust we shall learn something that will lift this load from our hearts."

"Until I knew her," said Jack, "my life had no aim or purpose, but since then I have been quite changed, and, had circumstances permitted, should have been a different being to what I am. I love her, and I will devote the whole of my life to shield her from all harm, stand between her and her enemies, and fight her battles, until I succeed in restoring her to that wealth and dignity from which she has been so unjustly debarred."

"You are a noble fellow, Jack," said Blueskin, deeply impressed by the earnest manner in which his companion had spoken. "You are a noble fellow, and it is a thousand pities that you have been spoilt, and your better feelings warped as they have been. Like you, I have the interest of my master's child at heart. Like you, I shall live for no other object than to see her restored to her rights."

There was a silence after these words were uttered, and they trotted on to Blackfriars-bridge a few minutes afterwards.

Already was the morning light making itself perceptible. Over the surface of the Thames there hung a slight mist.

They had gained about the centre of the bridge when they heard, on the hard stony roadway, the clattering of horses' feet.

Simultaneously they looked before them, for it was from that direction that the sounds came.

A party of six well-mounted men were coming over.

Our friends drew aside to allow them to pass them, if they would, unnoticed, but one of the horsemen who rode in advance of the others spurred his horse on towards them.

"Hullo!" he said. "Have you met any one on the road? Answer me, in the king's name. I am Jonathan Wild!"

CHAPTER CIX.

TAKES A GLANCE AT SOME OF THE PAST PROCEEDINGS OF JONATHAN WILD.

IN order to account for the unexpected and embarrassing appearance of Jonathan Wild upon the old bridge at Blackfriars, and before we relate what took place thereupon, it will be necessary for us to go back a little, and take a glance at his late proceedings, for, as the reader cannot fail to have observed, he has not occupied our attention lately.

In order, therefore, to preserve the chronological sequence of our narrative, we ought to go back to the time when he discovered the remains of the young man who had been so barbarously murdered.

As may be readily imagined, he did not fail to make as much of that affair as he possibly could, and take all the credit to himself.

Indeed, upon this occasion, he made a more than ordinary amount of fuss, for it was only by so doing once now and then that he succeeded in blinding the eyes of the authorities to his other questionable transactions.

The authorities, too, happened to require something of the sort from Jonathan, for they had expressed their disapprobation of his doings rather audibly, in consequence, not so much of what they had themselves seen, but of what the numerous complaints from the inhabitants set forth.

This lucky stroke, however, had the effect of completely satisfying all parties, and those who had said the most against him were now foremost in their praises of him.

In fact, it was just about this time that the popularity of Wild was at its culminating point, from which its decline was extremely rapid.

Lord Ingestrie never forgot the money it had cost him to get back his diamond necklace. Indeed, we cannot well see how he could forget, for he was an impoverished nobleman, and at times almost at his wits end for money.

Indeed, it is wonderful how he stood up against such a loss. Few knew the straits to which he was reduced.

The necklace would never have been redeemed at all, but it was an heir-loom, and many families knew that he possessed it. Lady Ingestrie never went anywhere without wearing it, and so had it been missed the most uncharitable construction would have been placed upon it, and though the story of its having been stolen might have been received and openly apparently believed, yet behind their backs hints of a very disagreeable nature would be dropped.

But the precious necklace once back, even at so great a price, his lordship determined, not so much out of desire to do the public service as procure his own revenge, his lordship, we say, determined to make an effort to put an end to that sort of thing, and it was mainly owing to his exertions that the Act of Parliament was framed and passed which made the carrying on of Wild's business so difficult as it afterwards became.

This Stansbury affair, however, for a time rendered all that he had done of no avail, for Jonathan, at his own expense, caused a number of pamphlets to be printed, professing to give an authentic account of the matter, and in which the most unmeasured praise was awarded to himself.

It is much to be regretted that there is not one of these little books extant. Now it would prove both interesting and instructive, as well as give a still better idea of what the man was like.

None knew better than he did the value and importance of following up an advantage gained.

Accordingly, he looked about him for some means by which he could apparently render the public still further service; nor was he long in finding what he sought.

We think it will be best given in the words of a writer of the period, who says—

"The vast increase and extensive circulation of counterfeit money some years ago was too obvious not to have attracted the notice of all ranks.

"It had become an enormous evil in the melancholy catalogue of crimes which the laws of the country were called upon to assist the police to suppress.

"Its extent almost exceeded credibility, and the dexterity and ingenuity of the coiners had (after considerable practice) enabled them to finish the different kinds of base money in so masterly a manner that it had become ex-

tremely difficult for a common observer to distinguish their spurious manufacture from the genuine silver of the mint.

"So systematic, too, had this nefarious traffic become, that the great dealers, who were in most instances the employers of the coiners, executed orders for the town and country with the same regularity as manufacturers in fair branches of trade.

"Scarcely a waggon or coach departed from the metropolis which did not carry boxes and parcels of base coin to the camps, seaports, and manufacturing towns.

"In London regular markets in various public and private houses were held by the principal dealers, where hawkers, pedlars, fraudulent horse dealers, unlicensed lottery-office keepers, gamblers at fairs, itinerant Jews, Irish labourers, servants of toll gatherers, and hackney coach owners, fraudulent publicans, market women, rabbit sellers, fish criers, barrow women, and many who could not be suspected, were regularly supplied with counterfeit copper and silver, with the advantage of nearly £100 per cent. in their favour, and thus it happened that through these various channels the country was deluged with immense quantities of base money.

"The mischief arising from counterfeiting the current coin of the realm reaches to every door. A poor man cheated by a single base shilling frequently sustains a loss greater than a forgery to the wealthy merchant.

"Coining or uttering base money is high treason in the second degree.

"To rob all the people is to be a traitor to the state."

The above-quoted author, William Baldwin, an attorney-at-law, who gave the subject the closest attention, a little further on writes as follows:—

"It has been discovered that there are at least one hundred and twenty persons in the metropolis and in the country employed principally in coining and selling base money, and this, independent of the numerous horde of utterers, who chiefly support themselves by passing it at its full value. It will scarcely be credited that, of criminals of this latter class who were either detected, prosecuted, or convicted within the last seven years, there stood upon the register of the Solicitor of the Mint more than six hundred and fifty names!

"When the reader is informed that two persons can finish from £200 to £300 (nominal value) in base silver in six days, and takes into calculation the number of known coiners, the aggregate amount in the course of the year will be found to be immense."

Some very interesting particulars are then given, and which, had we the space, we should willingly quote. But we must refrain from doing so. Our object was merely, by quoting from this author, to show the reader to what an insufferable extent the practice had been carried, and in order that, looking at things as they now are, they should not undervalue what Jonathan did.

The prevalence of counterfeit coin was about the greatest evil then in existence, and there was no one who did not feel the effects of it at some time or the other.

The result of this was, that for some time past there had been a very popular outcry against the "smashers," as the utterers of bad money were called, and the government was called upon to take some more energetic measures to suppress the evil.

This, then, was the chance which Jonathan seized upon, in order to thoroughly ingratiate himself into the favour of the public.

The policy of this must be at once obvious to all.

Situated as Jonathan was, and having so many spies in all parts of the kingdom, it was not long before he received intelligence of the whereabouts of an extensive gang of coiners and utterers of base coin.

These he resolved to make the stepping-stones to his popularity, by bringing to speedy justice.

Taking all his measures with the utmost precaution, and laying his plans with the greatest care, he succeeded in effecting their capture at the very moment they were engaged in their illegal trade.

Upon these offenders being lodged in prison, the legislature awoke at last to the fact that something by way of example must be done to these men, in order to strike terror into the hearts of others.

Accordingly, when placed upon their trial, they were found guilty of high treason, and sentenced to death.

That this was an extreme penalty for such an offence

must be conceded, but, at the same time, it is necessary to bear in view the gigantic proportions which this evil had assumed.

These men were duly executed, and then all felt that coming would be at an end, in consequence of which Jonathan rose to a still greater height than ever he had dreamed of.

And so, while things were prospering so well with the villainous thief-taker, those three persons in whom we feel so deep an interest were sinking into deeper and deeper trouble.

But surely the day will shortly come when—

The wronged shall be righted,
No wrong unrequited.

For the coming of that day, however, we must wait in patience. At present, darkness enshrouds the horizon, through which not the faintest glimmering of light is perceptible.

These matters occupied nearly the whole of Jonathan's attention, when he would fain have directed it in a totally different channel; but he felt the opportunity was too favourable to be lost.

Then the reader of this narrative will doubtless be able to account for the manner in which he spent his time up to that moment when, on returning to his domicile, he had been seriously wounded by some one in the garb of a gentleman, and whose face was perfectly unknown to him.

CHAPTER CX.

JONATHAN UNEXPECTEDLY FINDS THE CLUE TO THE MYSTERIOUS EVENTS WHICH SO PUZZLED HIM.

It will not be forgotten that Blueskin gave the thief-taker such a thrust with his sword that the weapon passed completely through his breast near the shoulder, and pinned him to the front door, against which he had been leaning.

Then Steggs, seeing his old foe so helpless, and unable to defend himself, had struck him a violent blow in the face with his fist, which rendered him insensible.

How Blueskin then withdrew his sword, and darted out into the street, followed by his two companions, we have already related.

Jonathan Wild fell down on the floor of his own hall like a corpse.

The janizaries who happened to be in the house, hearing his summons, and other sounds indicative that all was not going on just as it should, had hastened to the scene of action.

But they were in the upper portion of the house, and so rapid was Blueskin in all his movements, that, when they descended, they saw nothing but the open door, and Jonathan and Quilt Arnold lying as though dead upon the floor.

Their immediate and most natural impulse, therefore, was to surround their leader.

He was bleeding profusely, and showed no signs of vitality.

Quilt Arnold, however, was rapidly recovering himself, and by the time he was unbound was well enough to be able to give them some idea of what had happened.

Thereupon, one or two ran to the door and listened, but all was quite silent.

To attempt a pursuit would be folly.

And so they turned the whole of their attention to Jonathan.

In course of a little time, and under judicious treatment, he came to himself.

Of the horrible pain he suffered, and the still more horrible curses which he uttered, it is not our intention to say a word.

Let it suffice that the wound turned out not to be so serious a one as it looked. It had not touched any vital part, nor did it interfere in any way with his breathing or moving.

His iron constitution quickly enabled him to triumph over it, and in less time than any one would have believed possible, he was about as usual.

But his temper, never by any chance a very amiable one, was by no means improved by this little incident, and he had no especial cause for vexation.

It was his wish to appear to his men to be invincible, and for a long time he had preserved the character, but he

had met with several reverses lately, which tended to very seriously damage this equivocal reputation.

This was the feeling, then, that made his mind rise superior to the ills of his body, and the instant he was able to move he did so, altogether ignoring the advice of his medical attendant upon the subject.

The first thing he learned was that the mysterious personage he had encountered had made a burglarious attack upon his cells, and released the two prisoners who were confined there.

But although this troubled him much, there was something that troubled him still more.

Who could this unknown individual be who had successfully performed the hazardous exploit, and what was his motive for doing it.

He was perfectly bewildered.

He could think of nothing.

That the richly-attired stranger was no other than his old lieutenant and associate, Blueskin, never for one moment entered his mind; in fact, he was about as confident that he had given him his death wound as he was of anything.

Further thought only seemed still further to perplex him, and so at last he had to give it up in despair.

He was compelled to do this by the other matters that were pressing upon him and requiring his immediate attention.

There was Edgworth Bess.

Jack Sheppard.

Lord Donnull.

Of the first he could obtain no intelligence at all.

Of the second, he learned that he had been seen at Johnson's, in Drury-lane, and that he had in some mysterious manner managed to elude recapture.

He instantly determined to proceed to the "Black Lion" himself. He felt certain he was concealed somewhere on the premises, and trusted to his own acuteness to un-kennel him.

But when he reached it, it was just after Jack and Blueskin had departed upon their highway expedition.

Of course, not a word was said to him about it by the landlord, who was the only person in the secret of their having left, and of course no opposition was made to Wild's ransacking the house.

But Johnson's easy manner alone was almost enough to convince Wild that the prey he sought was secure, but just for satisfaction he looked closely about him.

The hiding-place in the stairs, however, was not discovered by him. It would require a closer examination than that which he upon this occasion made to detect it.

Eight men had accompanied him upon this little expedition, and when the search was over, he took the precaution of leaving three behind him to act as sentinels.

On reaching the street he looked carefully about him, but no signs of those he sought could be seen.

He stood for a moment undecided how to act.

He still clung to the idea that Jack had not left the neighbourhood.

While thus in thought, he felt a slight touch upon his arm.

Looking round to see who it was, he perceived one of those miserable-looking specimens of humanity which are now and then to be seen hanging about public-houses.

His clothes hung about him in tattered rags.

His feet were shoeless.

His eyes bleared and bloodshot.

His countenance full of furrows, in every one of which was an accumulation of dirt.

"Mr. Wild, Mr. Wild," he said, in hoarse, croaking, yet cringing accents.

"Ya—ah!"

"Mr. Wild!"

"Be off."

"I have something to tell you, Mr. Wild."

"Ha! What is it? Speak! Tell me," said Jonathan, suddenly turning round, and clutching the wretched being by the arm.

"Don't hurt me, Mr. Wild, and I will tell you."

"Be quick, then."

"You will give me something to drink if the news is worth anything to you?"

"Curse you! yes. Let me hear what you know."

"You didn't notice me in the 'Black Lion,' did you? Ah! there's many an hour I've spent there."



[EDGORTH BESS IS RESCUED BY COLONEL THORNE.]

"Ya—ah!"
 "And many a guinea, too."
 "Ya—ah! Stop; tell me what you know. Have you seen anything?"
 "Yes, Mr. Wild."
 "What?"
 "Well, while I was sitting in the front room near the door, at the beginning of the evening, I saw Johnson go to the door."
 "Go on!"
 "I am, Mr. Wild. I fancied something was the matter, so I made up my mind to keep my eyes open."
 "And what did you see?"
 "Two tip-top gents follow him to the doorstep, and then, after talking to each other a moment, went off."
 "Tell me more!" said Wild, impatiently, for he felt he was on the right scent now, "tell me more, I say."
 "Johnson came in again."
 "And you say these two gents spoke to him?"
 "Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Could you hear what was said?"
 "Partly, Mr. Wild."
 "What did you hear then? Quick! tell me, and you shall have a guinea."
 "A guinea?"
 "Go on, I say!"
 "You are joking with me."
 "If you don't tell me what you heard them say, and that at once," cried Wild, fiercely, "I will twist your head off!"
 "Oh! Mr. Wild, don't. I'll tell you all, indeed I will."
 "Quick, then!"
 "It was the tones, Mr. Wild, more than anything else, that struck me. It was a voice that I knew well, for I have heard it many times."
 "Whose voice?" thundered Jonathan.
 "Your head man's—Blueskin."
 "Blueskin!"
 "Yes, I recognised it in a moment."

"Impossible," said Wild; "he is dead!"

"No, I knew the tones."

"How was he dressed?"

"I only just caught sight of him. He was a real tall gentleman, with gold lace on his hat, and a maroon-coloured coat, with ruffles."

A hideous roar, such as might have come up from the throat of some enraged wild animal, burst from Jonathan's lips.

A light burst upon him.

He knew now who his mysterious assailant was. He recognised the description instantly.

Blueskin was not, as he thought, dead.

His men, who had crowded round him when the old man had addressed him, now listened with great eagerness for what should follow next.

CHAPTER

RELATES HOW JACK SHEPPARD WAS TAKEN PRISONER BY JONATHAN WILD, AND HOW BLUESKIN ESCAPED CAPTURE BY JUMPING OFF BLACKFRIARS-BRIDGE INTO THE THAMES.

"And the other!" said Wild, furiously. "What was he like?"

"A boy."

"Ah!"

"I've seen him before, Mr. Wild, though he was dressed better than usual then."

"Where have you seen him?"

"With Blueskin and Johnson, Mr. Wild."

"That's Jack then, by all that's damnable! But you do not tell me what you heard them say! Speak! Did you catch any words?"

"Only one or two, Mr. Wild."

"Tell me enough to put me on the track, and you shall name your own reward!"

"I heard them mention some one's name," said the besotted being, before whose clouded brain swept dim visions of unlimited drink. "I heard them mention some one's name."

"Well?"

"A girl's name, I take it."

"What was it? Quick! do not palter with me! Quick! what name was it, I say?"

"Bess!"

"I am right, then! Oh! but they shall pay dearly for this! Doubtless they think themselves very cunning and clever, and a match for Jonathan Wild, but I'll show them the reverse, for when they have circumvented me they will have but one more to out-manceuvre!"

"I know more, Mr. Wild," said the sot. "I can tell you more! I heard more!"

"Speak, then, in the fiend's name! What was it?"

"I heard Blueskin, for Blueskin I am sure it was, say, 'My first place will be the livery stables in Long-acre!'"

"Did you hear that?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Then why did you keep it back until now? Forward, my men, we have found the track at last! I know the place he speaks of, and it will go hard with me if I do not find out where they are! Forward!"

"But my reward, Mr. Wild?" said the old man, "you said I should name my own reward."

"I will save you the trouble, and give it you in full," said Jonathan, brutally.

As he spoke, he struck the poor wretch a violent blow on the head with his bludgeon.

He fell to the ground like a corpse.

This outbreak of gratuitous ferocity seemed to have a mollifying effect upon Wild's temper.

He laughed.

Then strode off with his men at his heels in the direction of Long-acre.

He knew the stables well. He had many a time aired horses from the keeper of them, and so, without any hesitation or delay, he went direct to Charles-street.

Under the low archway, into the spacious paved yard he passed.

Even as Blueskin himself would have done, he gave a peculiar whistle.

It was immediately responded to by the appearance of the ostler, who always sat up during the night in order to receive the cattle when they returned.

The man carried in his hand a large stable lantern.

He held it up high above his head, as he cried—

"Who's there?"

Jonathan did not speak, but glided forward, so that the full force of the lantern's rays should fall upon his hideous physiognomy.

He gave it, too, the most horrible expression he possibly could.

The man drew back with a faint cry of dread.

Jonathan's name and face were well known to every person in London.

Indeed, the latter once seen could never be forgotten. It made too deep an impression on the mind for that.

"Ya-ah," he snarled. "You know me?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild. If you please, sir."

"Ya-ah."

"Do you want anything, Mr. Wild?"

"Yes; and mind you speak the truth."

"Oh! I will, sir."

"Or you shall swing at Tyburn next sessions, and you must know, when I promise any one that, they are as good as scragged already."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Answer me, then! Two persons came here to-night and hired two horses. Don't attempt to deny that! I know it, and, moreover than that, know who those two men are."

"You—you are right, Mr. Wild," said the ostler, who had but a vague and undefined idea of the extent of Wild's powers of mischief.

"Ya-ah. Now then; tell me the truth, as you value your life. Which way did they take?"

"I don't know, Mr. Wild."

"Seize him, then," cried Jonathan to his men. "To Newgate with him; he shall suffer for his ignorance."

"No—no, Mr. Wild! Spare me!"

"Tell me which way they went then."

"They only trotted out into Long-acre, Mr. Wild. I saw no more of them."

"Did you hear nothing that would enable you to guess?"

"No, Mr. Wild, except that they said something about the Kent-road."

"The Kent-road?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Ass—dolt. Why did you not mention this before?"

"Mercy—mercy."

"Are you sure you heard them mention the Kent-road?"

"Quite sure, Mr. Wild. But I didn't pay no sort of attention, because you see it was no business of mine."

"Six horses!" yelled Jonathan. "Make haste, villain. Six horses! Saddle them at once! They are for the king's service! My men will help! Quick! We shall catch them yet!"

Jonathan's myrmidons at once released their prisoner, and followed him into the stable.

There was no lack of horses, so six were quickly caparisoned and led out.

Jonathan was full of impatience.

The delay, trifling as it was, chafed him.

He vaulted into the saddle.

Then, striking his spurs into his horse's flanks, he cried—

"Follow me! To the Kent-road! Forward! Forward!"

His men knew better than to dally, and they dashed after him almost before they had got their seats.

Straight towards Blackfriars-bridge he went.

By the time they reached it, his men had got into proper order, and as they went they formed quite a military-looking cavalcade.

How they met Blueskin and Jack Sheppard upon the bridge, as they were returning from their night excursion, we have already related.

In the dim, misty light, Wild did not immediately recognise them.

But he rode forward in order to assure himself, and addressed them.

The near approach enabled him to see that one of the horsemen was the mysterious visitant to his own house.

The other he did not for a moment doubt was Jack Sheppard.

"Seize them!" he yelled. "Do not allow them to escape! Seize them!"

"Fight for your life and liberty," shouted Blueskin, drawing his sword.

Jack immediately followed his example.

Then ensued one of the most desperate combats that could be imagined.

Hemmed in as they were, flight was out of the question.

By keeping close to the parapet of the bridge, however, they prevented their enemies getting behind.

But the odds were three to one.

Odds too great for them to have the hope of proving victors.

Still they fought with the utmost desperation.

To be deprived of liberty just at that moment would be destructive in the extreme.

But it very soon became evident that such would be the case.

Jack was suddenly disarmed and made a prisoner.

Single-handed, to have attempted his rescue would have been the height of folly.

But how was he to escape sharing his fate?

His foes were pressing with redoubled vigour upon him.

He resolved upon a desperate expedient.

It was perilous, but then he thought his position could hardly be worse than it then was.

Freeing one foot from the stirrup, he, at the same instant, swept his sword around him with such resistless fury, that a circle was left for a brief instant by it.

Taking advantage of that small interval of time, he took out his other foot, and placed it on the parapet of the bridge.

Then, with a violent effort, he sprang over into the river.

So astounded were Wild's men by this feat, that they stood as if turned to stone, until they heard the heavy splash below, which told them that his body had reached the water.

Jonathan was the first to recover himself, for he had been as much taken aback as his men.

"Guard your prisoner!" he cried. "Look that he does not escape. The rest of you follow me."

As he thus spoke, and without waiting to see whether his hasty commands were attended to, he galloped to the end of the bridge.

Then, dismounting, he ran round the corner to where the steps descended to the water's edge.

Two of his men held Jack firmly.

The other three followed close at his heels.

Down the wet, slippery steps he dashed like a madman.

It is the greatest wonder in the world that he did not miss his footing and fall headlong to the bottom.

But he did not.

The mist that hung upon the surface of the Thames baffled his vision.

With straining eyes he strove to pierce it.

"Boat, your honour?" said a sleepy voice. "Want a boat, your honour?"

CHAPTER CXII.

EDGORTH BESS FINDS SUCCOUR, EVEN AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR, BUT DOES NOT REACH THE TERMINATION OF HER PERILS.

SHRIEK after shriek burst from the lips of poor Edgorth Bess, as the Mohawks continued their diabolical sport.

But so far from desisting in consequence, they persevered the more, and replied to her screams of agony by shouts of wild maniac laughter.

It was in vain she tried to escape the sharp points of the swords, and when she instinctively drew back, it was only to have her progress stopped by another weapon entering her back.

Yet none of these wounds were serious ones, though they caused her intolerable pain and fright.

In vain she asked for mercy.

A deaf ear was turned to her supplications.

But suddenly, when she felt that she was about to faint, there was the hurried dash of horses' footsteps from the direction of Temple-bar.

The sound reached not only the ears of the poor girl, and filled her with new hope, but it reached her tormentors also.

They paused a moment.

That moment was enough.

Before it had expired a horseman dashed into their midst.

He was fully armed.

His long heavy sword was drawn, and he laid about him with terrible effect.

With a cry of joy, Edgworth Bess sprang forward and grasped the horse's bridle.

Instinctively she recognised the rider as a deliverer.

"Whoop! whoop! ahoy!" shouted the Mohawks. "Down with him, lads! down with him! Whoop! ahoy!"

Clashing their swords together, they pressed forward to the attack.

But the stranger, who had so opportunely made his appearance upon the scene of action, stooped down, and with an apparently slight effort, lifted Bess on to his horse.

Then he whirled his ponderous weapon round his head, and the Mohawks fell before it like grain before the sickle.

His steed, too, he made to prance and rear in such a manner, that the villains could not reach him.

But well skilled in the art of defence as he was, he knew very well he could not obtain a permanent advantage over so many foes.

Watching his opportunity, then, and goading his horse almost to madness, he cut a way through the throng.

Right and left his sword flashed with inconceivable rapidity, and every time it came down one of his opponents fell to the earth.

He was clear.

The Mohawks, burning with rage, commenced an ineffectual pursuit.

At a tremendous gallop, the horse, making nothing of its double burden, dashed along the Strand.

In less than two minutes all sounds from the band of dissolute young men had died away.

Edgworth Bess was saved.

But by whom?

She had not seen his face.

She had not heard his voice.

But she felt that he was a friend.

And then the moment he lifted her upon his horse, and she felt that she was comparatively safe, her spirits failed her, and she fell into a swoon.

By whom had she been saved?

Into what hands had she fallen?

Had she found a friend and a protector?

Or had she found a foe and a persecutor?

These are questions which time alone can answer, but much can be judged from a person's appearance, and so we will take a glance at that of the girl's saviour.

There is now light enough in the sky for objects to be distinctly and clearly visible.

Just at the corner of Whitehall he pulled up, and bent down to look at his inanimate burden.

As he does so, the first thing that strikes the beholder is his immense proportions.

His height must be close upon, if not quite, six feet.

His form is well filled out.

His face large, square, and massive, with angular features, large, fierce-looking eyes, and deep lines about his mouth, betokening firmness and resolution.

In accordance with the almost universal fashion of the time, he wore a peruke.

The plain, three-cornered hat he wore allowed a broad forehead to be visible.

Then his arms, legs, and body would have befitted Hercules.

But yet there was nothing clumsy and ungainly about him. His proportions, although on so large a scale, were perfect.

His horse was a large, powerful creature, and more to be admired for its strength and endurance than its symmetry.

But as for the man himself, there was something about the expression of his countenance that was far from being pleasing.

Any one could have told at a glance that he was fitted to take the lead in any desperate enterprise.

Nor did he look like one who would permit any obstacle to stand long in the way, if it interfered at all with his designs.

"By heavens!" he said, in a deep, rough voice, "as pretty a face as ever I have seen! Beautiful! Who is she, I wonder? and how shall I restore her to her senses? Well made she is, too," he continued, as his eyes roamed over her person; "what a beautiful hand! I love her already! I will take her where she can be attended to. Ha! what is that?"

For the first time, he noticed that blood was flowing from her in many places.

"Is she dead?" he asked; "why the villains have wounded her! What did it mean, I wonder? I will be off with her at once, or may be I shall now be too late to save her."

Thus speaking, he made his way at an easy canter along Pall-mall to St. James's-street.

At the door of one of these houses he paused.

It was an imposing, aristocratic-looking edifice, and such as any nobleman might be proud of as a home.

His return seemed to have been expected by some one, for as soon as his horse was brought to a standstill, the door of the house was opened.

A man came forth.

He was dressed like a gentleman's servant, out of livery, but somehow he did not look to have either the face or form of one.

"Fennell!" cried the man on horseback.

"Yes, sir."

"Send Waldron to hold the horse, and call Mrs. Lovat."

"Yes, sir."

The man who had been called Fennell re-entered the house.

A moment afterwards another emerged, who took the horse by the bridle.

Making nothing of his burden, and holding it in his arms, the unknown dismounted with ease, and strode into the house.

The door was closed behind him.

Hurriedly crossing a large hall, he kicked open a door, and entered a room furnished in the most luxurious fashion conceivable.

A large bright fire was burning in the grate, while on the table was laid a slight repast.

The shutters were closed, and the curtains drawn, so that no trace of the faint daylight entered.

A candelabra standing in the centre of the table, and carrying about a dozen wax candles, brilliantly illuminated the apartment.

Near the window was a large couch, made after the capacious and comfortable fashion of our ancestors.

With more care and gentleness than one would have thought such a huge specimen of humanity possessed, the unknown laid Edgworth Bess upon it.

As he did so, she uttered a faint moan.

Just then some one tapped gently at the open door.

"Come in, Mrs. Lovat."

In obedience to this command, a thin, plain-looking woman, apparently fifty years of age, entered.

"Attend to her," said the unknown, in the manner of one used to commanding others. "You will know best what to do. If necessary, send for a surgeon."

This said, he at once left the room without vouchsafing the woman the least explanation.

But she was used to his ways.

The first thing she did was to make an examination of her charge.

Her pale and marble-like face attracted her attention for a moment, but it was quickly diverted to her body, from which the blood in many places was oozing slowly.

But the alarm she first felt was quickly dissipated, for she found the hurts to be all of a very superficial character.

She had her then carried upstairs into a bed-chamber, where her first care was to arouse her from her swoon, and then to wash and dress her wounds.

No words can depict the poor girl's astonishment upon opening her eyes.

She did so with a shudder, for she feared to see around her the fierce faces of the Mohawks.

Instead of that, however, she found herself environed by luxury, such luxury as she had never seen, perhaps even ever dreamed of.

But it was in vain she asked for some explanation; the woman, Mrs. Lovat, persisted in remaining silent.

Wearied out at length, Edgworth Bess fell into a deep slumber.

It was an unrefreshing sleep, and haunted by terrible dreams.

How long it lasted she knew not, but it must have been many hours.

When she awoke and looked around, she found herself alone.

The pain from her wounds had sensibly abated.

But she could tell she was fearfully weak. It was only by making a great effort that she could raise her hand.

The windows in the chamber were facing her.

They were covered with thick curtains, and through them penetrated a very faint, subdued light.

Wondering whether it was morning or evening, she was startled by a slight sound.

She turned her head in the direction from which it came, and saw the man who had rescued her from her great peril enter, and approach the bedside.

CHAPTER CXIII.

EDGWORTH BESS, WITHOUT DUE CAUSE, FORMS A BAD OPINION OF COLONEL THORNE.

It would seem that he had expected to find her sleeping, for when he saw her large, full eyes fixed upon him, he gave a start, and a partial air of confusion was visible in his manner.

And now, it must be borne in mind that Edgworth Bess did not catch the most transient glimpse of her preserver's face. She saw he was a man, and that was all.

So, with suspense and alarm struggling in her mind, she gazed upon the intruder.

The first sight she caught of his countenance repelled her.

Why it was she knew not.

As the poet says—

"Ye who know the reason, tell me,

How it is that instinct still,
Prompts the heart to like, or like not,
At its own capricious will?

Tell me by what hidden magic,

Our impressions first are led

Into liking, or disliking,

Of before a word be said.

Is it instinct, or some spirit,

Which protects us, and controls

Every impulse we inherit

By some sympathy of souls?

Is it instinct? is it nature?

Or some freak or fault of chance,

Which our liking, or disliking,

Limits to a single glance?"

Be the power what it may, it unquestionably exists, and Edgworth Bess felt in a moment that she was looking upon one who would prove no friend of hers.

But on the other side quite a different feeling took place.

As the unknown gazed upon the face of her whom he had saved, and saw how very fair and beautiful it was, a wild and passionate love sprang up in his bosom.

Finding he did not speak, Edgworth Bess commanded her voice sufficiently to do so, though the effort was almost beyond her strength.

"Is this your house?" she asked.

The stranger bowed as he replied—

"It is."

"For what reason, then, am I brought here?"

"Is it possible you cannot guess?"

"I cannot."

"Think back a little, then. What is the last thing you can recollect?"

Bess was silent a moment, during which she was endeavouring to separate what had really happened from the occurrences she had dreamed.

"I remember," she replied, slowly, "that I was hunted through the streets by a number of men—by their dress, gentlemen. They caught me near St. Clement's Church, and tried to murder me."

"What then?"
 "I felt almost dying, when I heard a horse's hoofs upon the road, and then some one dashed among my persecutors, lifted me on to his horse, and then—then—"

"What then?"
 "I remember no more until I awoke, and found myself here."

"Is it possible you do not remember who rescued you?"

"I never saw him."
 "Never saw him?"

"No, a mist was before my eyes. I saw some one, but who I have not the slightest idea."

"It is strange. Did you hear his voice?"
 "I did not notice it. But why do you ask so many questions?"

"Simply because"—
 "What?"

"It was myself."

To say that Edgworth Bess did not anticipate this avowal would not be true. She dreaded, yet hoped she should not hear it.

In spite of her attempt to suppress it, a shudder of loathing passed over her.

But it was so slight that the unknown did not notice it.

"It was myself," he said. "By chance I was riding down Fleet-street, when just as I passed under Temple-bar, I heard a succession of screams. My first impulse was to ride at full speed to see what was amiss. I saw you surrounded by a gang of ruffians. I dispersed them! Carried you off in safety! Found you bleeding and insensible! Had no idea where you lived, and brought you here!"

All that he said was reasonable enough, but yet, for the life of her, Bess could not find words wherewith to thank him.

And yet there was nothing in his conduct with which she could have found fault. Under the circumstances, no one could have acted otherwise.

But in the face of this there was the strong feeling of misliking which she had experienced when first her eyes had rested upon his countenance.

This feeling she strove to combat.
 "You must forgive me," she said, "for not remembering you. It was ungrateful of me."

"Nay, nay. I can easily understand"—

"And if I do not express my thanks to you for the great service and kindness you have rendered me in the manner that I ought, it is because I am unwell."

"I am sure you must be. Remain here, however, in peace until you feel yourself well enough to move. You must pardon my intrusion, but I fancied you still slept. I wished to assure myself that you were well, yet would not for the world have disturbed you."

"You did not disturb me," replied Bess; "I was awake, and wondering how I came here. Now I am at rest."

"It pleases me to hear you say as much, and now, before I leave you, there is one question I wish to ask of you."

"What is it, sir?"
 "I cannot but think that there must be those who are in deep trouble respecting your disappearance. Where is your home?"

Bess burst into tears.
 The stranger looked vexed.

"What have I said to distress you?" he asked.
 "I have no home!"

"No home?"
 "No; but there is one who will be full of anxiety to know where I am. His—his—"—

"Where shall I find him?"

"Will you assure him of my safety?"

"With your permission, yes."

"Thanks, sir! I shall never be able to repay you."

"Do not talk of that. Who am I to tell that you are safe?"

"Jack."

"Jack what?"
 "Jack Sheppard!"

"Jack Sheppard!" said the unknown, repeating the name several times, "and where does he live?"

"You will find him at a public-house in Drury-lane, called the 'Black Lion,' and kept by a man named John-

son. If he—that is, Jack—is not there, leave word, and that will be enough."

"I will do it."
 "Thanks! thanks!"

"I will send a messenger there at once. Is there anything more? Do not be afraid to speak."

"There is nothing more."

"I will go, then. Mrs. Lovat will attend to you. Good night."

"Good night, sir," said Bess, "if night it is."

"Yes, it is night."
 "How long, then, have I slept?"

"More than twelve hours."
 "More than twelve hours! Oh! sir, add still more to the obligation I am under to you by sending at once to Drury-lane."

"I will, you may depend upon it."

The unknown then retired.
 A vague, uncertain dread of something wrong pressed upon Bess's spirits.

Yet every consideration was shown her.
 She had met with nothing but fairness and kindness.

Over and over again did she reproach herself for having such feelings.

But she could not master them. If for a time she succeeded in driving them back, they only returned directly afterwards with double force.

It struck her as being rather strange that he had never asked her name, nor communicated his own.

That, however, might be only a natural omission.
 And so, without any new incident, the night wore away.

It was not until the middle of the day following that her preserver entered.

Bess was wonderfully better; indeed, she felt well enough to rise and dress, but was dissuaded from doing so by Mrs. Lovat.

There was no misunderstanding the eager inquiring look which she gave the stranger as he entered.

"I have sent," he said.
 "Yes—yes!"

"But the person you inquired for was not there."
 "But you left the message?"

"My man did."
 "That is right, then."

"And now," said the stranger, "I hope you will listen to me, and be not offended with what I say."

"I could not be so ungrateful to you."

"Make, then, this house your home until such time as you feel yourself sufficiently recovered to leave it. Do not hesitate, I beg. You will still receive the same treatment as you have done hitherto."

"Accept my thanks, sir; but I think I shall be well enough to leave in the course of an hour or so. I should have risen this morning, only Mrs. Lovat expressly desired me not to do so."

"And she is right. Do not think of moving yet. Is there anything more that I can do for you? I hope you will excuse me making the remark, but ever since I saw you I have felt the greatest possible interest in you. This house is mine. My name is Thorne. Generally known as Colonel Thorne, though I am not now in the service. I have no friends and relatives of my own, and that will explain in a great measure the interest I feel in you."

This speech was a kind enough one, and sounded fair enough, but yet Bess could not divest herself of the idea that there was something more than could be seen at a first glance in this fairness and kindness.

The speech, too, was one which having contained a confidence, ought to receive one in return, and so she said—

"I must again thank you, sir, for all that you have said and done. I am a poor girl—an orphan—with but one friend in the world—the one to whom I sent a message. I have to work hard for a livelihood, and my occupation is that of a shroud-maker."

CHAPTER CXIV.

COLONEL THORNE BEGINS TO SHOW THE CLOVEN FOOT, AND EDGORTH BESS'S WORST SUSPICIONS ARE FULLY REALIZED.

COLONEL THORNE will, for the next few pages, play rather a prominent part in this narrative, and so we will devote a few lines to him especially.

Firstly, then, as he had said, the palatial-looking resi-

dence in St. James's-street was his, or rather, he occupied it.

Throughout it was furnished in a most luxurious and expensive style.

Among a certain set in London, there were few better known than Colonel Thorne, though from what source his income was derived, or in what regiment he had held a colonelcy was an inscrutable mystery.

But that he had abundant pecuniary resources was manifest to everybody who came in contact with him, for he spent money with a freedom and a lavishness that was utterly astounding.

It was, however, tolerably notorious among his friends that he had a very pretty residential estate, situated upon the cliffs, not far from Dover, and this place was at once the envy and admiration of all who saw it.

Here he passed a great deal of his time, being frequently absent from London months together.

During his stay, too, in this place, which was known as "The Larches," from the great quantity of those deciduous trees growing upon the estate, he lived in the strictest privacy, permitting no visitors to see him, or, in modern parlance, being "at home" to no one.

There were occasions, however, when he would throw open this place, and send invitations to his friends, but very rarely.

Still, the reputation of what he possessed was spread about.

The only point upon which public curiosity was unsatisfied, was his source of revenue.

He was known, while in London, to gamble a great deal, and some hinted that it was by this dishonourable means that he procured the wherewith to support him in his extravagances.

But there was a mystery about Colonel Thorne, and what that mystery was the reader will not be long in discovering.

Soon after the interview was over, and he left her, Bess determined to rise.

It was not that she felt so very well, though her wounds did not give her so much inconvenience as one would have thought, but she was full of anxiety to know where Jack was, and whether he had got free from the clutches of Jonathan Wild, for the reader will remember that when she saw him last he was a prisoner in Wild's hands.

Whether he had succeeded in getting free, whether he had been murdered by the villainous thief-taker, or whether he still languished a captive in his cells, she knew not, and had no means of ascertaining.

The intelligence that he was not at the "Black Lion" made her uneasy, but not very so. She knew that, in all probability, he would be denied to a stranger.

So she resolved to dress herself and proceed at once to Drury-lane, where she would be sure of finding a home, and also hearing the worst that had happened.

In pursuance, then, of this determination, she attired herself.

Whenever she moved she was in considerable pain, but the hurts she had received were scarcely more than skin-deep, for the corset which she wore protected her in a great measure.

More than once she had to rest, but at last the operation of dressing was completed.

Her clothing was in a sad condition, but she did not care for that.

And now she felt that, great as was her dislike to Colonel Thorne, she could not leave him without informing him of her intention of doing so, and again thanking him for the trouble he had taken, and the kind manner in which he had behaved.

There was a little silver hand-bell that stood upon a small table near the bedside, and this, after some hesitation, she ventured to ring.

The summons was immediately obeyed by Mrs. Lovat, who expressed, in very audible terms, her disapprobation of the step which the young girl had taken.

But she evinced the utmost alacrity to inform Colonel Thorne of her wish to leave the house.

The bed-chamber in which Bess had been placed had but one door, and that door opened into another apartment fitted up as a sitting-room.

When Mrs. Lovat departed, she shut the first door, and, crossing the sitting-room, closed the door of that which

led into the passage, cautiously and silently turning the key in the lock.

Edgworth Bess was a prisoner!

It was some time, however, before she made this discovery.

However, as minute after minute passed away, and she heard no signs of the colonel's approach, she grew impatient, and, rising from the easy chair in which she had been sitting, she went to the door, and, opening it, passed into the sitting-room.

It was the first time she had seen the interior of this apartment, and she was, for more than a minute, absolutely amazed at its magnificence.

No description in any fairy tale which she had read, nor idea which she had formed, at all came up to it.

For a little while, then, and almost unconscious of what she was about, Edgworth Bess stood just upon the threshold of this room, admiring its rich and varied contents.

It was some time before she saw the door. All must have noticed what a blemish a door is to a room, and the owner of the house had exhibited considerable ingenuity in remedying the defect.

Round all four sides, and reaching to within about three feet of the ceiling, was a beautifully carved wainscot, composed of the finest Spanish mahogany, at that time a scarcer, and consequently more expensive, wood than it is at the present day.

This wainscot was formed into panels, each about two-and-a-half feet in width, by rather more than six feet in height.

In every one of these panels was painted a grand historical portrait, the persons selected being those most celebrated in English history.

The frames to these pictures consisted of an elaborately carved border, cut in the wainscot.

As the apartment was of considerable size, the effect was very grand.

The harmony of the whole was unbroken—no door was visible.

Had there have been, all would have been spoiled.

Of course the reader comprehends that one of these panels formed the door—or rather that the door was painted to imitate the panels—but this was not apparent at a first glance.

On the door was painted a beautiful full-length portrait of Lady Jane Grey.

It was so arranged that the part in the deepest shadow should be where the handle of the door was fixed, and the better to escape observation, this was small, and made of dark wood to match the colouring of the picture.

Bess probably would have been some time in discovering this had she not noticed that the door leading to the bedroom was painted to imitate the panels, with a handle of the kind described wherewith to open it.

This gave her the clue, and, after a very little searching, she found the one leading into the passage.

She turned the knob in the same way that the other turned, but the door remained fast.

She could scarcely believe at first that she had been locked in, but she found that such was really the case.

She was a prisoner.

In a moment the apartment which she had so much admired, and of which she had felt certain she never could grow tired, lost all its charms. It became suddenly distasteful to her sight, and she longed for nothing so much as to leave it.

She made a vain attempt to force the door, but it was too strong, and would have resisted thrice her strength.

Bursting into tears, she sank upon her seat.

Why was she made prisoner?

What fresh ill was there in store for her?

The forebodings which she had felt were now approaching a realization.

Suddenly she thought of the windows.

An invincible desire to get free from that house took possession of her.

The windows she thought might not be fast, and she might get out that way.

Those in the sitting-room were too high for her to reach.

She ran to the bedroom.

Breathlessly she pushed back the fastener, and strove to raise the sash.

Alas!

It remained firm as a rock. Either it had been nailed up, or never made to open.

It was while she was thus engaged, that she heard a faint clicking sound in the outer room.

She ran to it instantly.

"Mrs. Lovat tells me you wish to leave here," said a voice, and Colonel Thorne stepped into the room and closed the door.

Poor Bess!

Her heart seemed to stand still.

All the blood seemed to forsake her body and congregate about her heart.

"You will excuse me for saying so," continued Colonel Thorne, calmly, "but I hardly think you will be acting prudently by leaving here so soon. Your face is ashy pale, and you look much worse than you did yesterday even."

"Thank you," gasped Bess, faintly; "but I would rather go. I cannot stay here, indeed I cannot. It will do me more harm to stay than go."

"You are mistress here," said the colonel, "and quite free to go whenever you may think proper."

Edgworth Bess felt the question rise to her tongue—

"Then why was the door locked upon me?" but she thought it might be best policy not to give it utterance, but take him at his word.

"Let me go, then, sir," she said. "Let me go at once; and, if the prayers and good wishes of a poor girl can do you any service, I am sure you shall have them. I am sorry I have nothing better to offer you—nothing more worthy of your acceptance."

CHAPTER CXV.

THE COLONEL SHOWS HIMSELF AT LAST IN HIS TRUE COLOURS, BUT NOT UNTIL HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN HIS DESIGNS.

"You must excuse me, my dear girl," said Colonel Thorne, advancing a few steps, and taking Edgworth Bess by the hand. "You must excuse me if I ask you to do me the favour not to go just this moment, but sit down, for I wish to speak to you, and seriously, for a little while before we part."

There was something so kind—so paternal about this speech—or rather about the way in which it was spoken, that Edgworth Bess felt all her suspicions and presages of ill almost entirely vanish.

She forgot the locked door, and all that was equivocal in the colonel's behaviour, and replied—

"I cannot refuse you, sir, having done so much for me as you have, but I hope you will not be offended if I ask you to be no longer than you can help, and let me go as soon as you are able."

"I make that promise freely," said the Colonel, leading Bess to a chair, in which she seated herself.

Then, drawing another close to it, he himself sat down.

There was a silence for about a moment.

"I hardly know how to frame my words," he began, at length, "but, from the moment that I first saw your face, I loved you, and every time that I have seen you since has only had the effect of increasing my passion. You tell me you are alone in the world, and have to work hard to procure a scanty and uncertain subsistence. Now I am rich, am in a position to gratify your every desire, maintain you in a state that many princesses even would envy. In short, if you will accept it, I offer you my protection, and"—

So far, Edgworth Bess listened in silence, she would have spoken before, but she found it impossible. Suddenly starting to her feet, she said—

"You have mistaken me, sir! I am poor—I am friendless—I am alone in the world! But I am honest, and I take the words you have just now spoken as the greatest insult you could possibly offer me! For your kindness in rescuing me from death, and taking such care of me, believe me I am very very grateful and shall always be so! But you are mistaken in me!"

Colonel Thorne saw that he had made a false move—that he had allowed his purpose to be seen too plainly, but he by no means considered the mischief done as irreparable.

In saying that he had fallen violently in love with Bess, he only told the truth. Her face, her voice, her manner, all charmed him, and he loved her as all such natures as

his do love. He was a man of fierce passions and unlimited means, so that it was very rarely that he failed in accomplishing his purpose.

Few men could be found better actors than he was. The bearing he had assumed towards Bess was as foreign and totally opposed to his ordinary manner as winter is to summer, and yet so well did he do it that it would have deceived or imposed upon more suspicious natures than hers.

Poor girl! She was like a bird in the snare of the fowler. Fluttering awhile, and then—

Bursting with rage as the colonel was, he allowed no indication of it to be visible. Indeed, he was perfectly calm and unruffled, with the exception of the air of vexation and contrition which he assumed.

He, too, rose to his feet.

"Pray forgive me," he said, "for what I have done! Take me back, if you can, into your good opinion. Make what excuse you can. All I can say is, that I was led away by the influence of your beauty. Had you not wished to depart so precipitately, I should not have spoken as I did, and if heartfelt sorrow will atone for what I have done, I tender it here."

The earnest and respectful manner in which these words were uttered is perfectly indescribable.

Need we say that Edgworth Bess, unused to the ways of the world as she was, freely forgave him for his offence?

"If you wish me to retain always a good opinion of you," she said, "if you wish me always to look up to you as my protector, you will suffer me to depart at once."

"Then I will do so," said the colonel. "You are quite free to go this very moment, if you think proper. It is only because I love you as I have never yet loved, that I am able to do this, but I feel that your happiness is my own. Therefore go. But as we are about to part, probably never to encounter each other again in life, take with you the assurance that there is one who loves you—that there is one who will wish that your life may be a truly happy one, and, whenever he has the opportunity, will do all that lies in his power to make it so."

Edgworth Bess was touched.

Her heart fluttered.

She believed what she had heard uttered with so much fervent earnestness, was the genuine sentiments of the man who gave them utterance.

But she shook off the feeling slightly, and then she thought of Jack, and she shook it off altogether.

"You will always have my respect and gratitude," she said. "But we must part. It will be best for both to do so. Farewell!"

Colonel Thorne had bowed his head, but all the time he was looking furtively at her. He saw she was determined.

"Farewell!" he said, in a voice broken with emotion, and holding out his hand as he spoke. "Farewell!"

Timidly, Edgworth Bess placed her hand in his.

She felt that it trembled, and was vexed, yet could not help it.

Gentleness and devotion will ever touch a woman's heart.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Before we part," said the colonel, taking her hand between both of his own, "tell me your name. I have never heard it yet, and I should like to have a name by which I could remember you. Tell it to me. What is it?"

"Elizabeth."

"A queenly name! Am I to remember you by that alone?"

"My other name is Donnull."

"Then, Elizabeth Donnull, as I shall remember you do you remember me. There is one old English custom which I have always admired, and I should like to keep it now. I am fond of old customs; they seem to carry us back into the past, and bring us into close communion with our ancestors. Will you favour me, or humour me, whichever you may choose to call it, by complying with this custom?"

"What is it, sir?"

"A very simple one. To drink with me."

"Drink with you?"

"Yes, do not be astonished. I will pour out a glass of wine. Do you give me your good wishes, and drink of the

contents. Then hand the cup to me, and I will give you my good wishes, and drain the goblet to the dregs!"

"It is a strange request."

"Why so?"

"It seems so."

"I will not press it on you if it be against your inclination, but if you will do as I wish you, you will make me very happy."

When the wine was mentioned, Edgworth Bess thought of the locked door and the colonel's infamous proposal, and she dreaded some villainy; but when she saw he did not press it on her, and that he would drink from the same glass, she discarded her suspicions as unworthy and unfounded. "I shall be only too glad," she said, "to do anything in my power to make you happy."

A flash seemed to come from the colonel's eyes, but it went again almost quicker than it appeared, and he was cool and collected as before.

He walked to a side table, on which were some dried fruits, and several decanters containing wine and spirits.

One of these he took.

By its colour it seemed to be sherry.

Then, from the same place, he took a silver goblet that would, perhaps, hold nearly three-quarters of a pint.

This he placed on a silver salver, and brought it to the table in the centre of the room.

Edgworth Bess watched him narrowly. There might be no harm or treachery intended; still, it would be best to be prepared.

The colonel placed the decanter, and the salver with the cup upon it, side by side.

"I am sorry to detain you, but it will not last long. There is one portion of the custom of which I have not yet spoken."

"What is that, then?" asked Bess, all her doubts springing up with fresh force.

"It is very simple, and need not, that I know of, be adhered to. That you shall please yourself about. It is that you should pour the wine from the decanter into the goblet, and that I should hand you the salver."

Again were her doubts and fears dispelled, and this time she felt angry with herself for having indulged in them.

Alas! poor inexperienced heart, she did not know that this was all the result of careful calculation, and done in order to throw her completely off her guard.

"Willingly," she said, and she took out the massive stopper from the mouth of the decanter, and lifting it up, poured some of the contents into the cup.

She was satisfied all was well.

Could she but have seen the colonel's face at that moment, how suddenly she would have altered her opinion.

It was contorted by a demoniac mocking smile, such as one might imagine to appear upon the countenance of the Evil One upon seeing a human soul about to fall into his hands.

The decanter had a very slender neck, and it took some little time to fill the cup.

At length the amber-coloured fluid reached the brim.

Its surface was diversified with a few crystalline beads.

Colonel Thorne took the salver, and held the goblet to her.

"Drink," he said. "It is the real Amontillado, and will do you good."

Edgworth Bess took the proffered draught.

She murmured a few words, the import of which the colonel did not care to catch.

Then she raised the goblet to her lips, and drank a small portion of the contents.

Then she handed it back.

The colonel held it in his right hand.

"I ought, first of all," he said, "to thank you for your ready compliance with my strange whim. I do so. And then I have before me the far more pleasing task of wishing you every possible happiness which this world can afford. May you"—

CHAPTER CXVI.

EDGWORD BESS IS THREATENED WITH WORSE DANGER FROM COLONEL THORNE THAN WITH THE MOHAWKS.

THE COLONEL ABRUPTLY CEASED, AND PLACED THE GOBLET OF WINE UNTASTED ON THE TABLE.

THE HYPOCRITIC WISH HE WAS ABOUT TO UTTER WAS ARRESTED ON HIS LIPS.

There was no need for it.

A strange shudder swept over Edgworth Bess.

She tried to speak.

She tried to move.

But she failed in both these attempts.

Despite herself, her eyes closed, her limbs gave way beneath her, and she would have sunk to the ground had it not been that the colonel sprang forward, and caught her in his arms.

Fervently he pressed her to his breast, and rained kisses upon her lips, cheeks, eyes, and forehead.

But mastering himself by a great effort, he laid her on a couch.

Then, going to the wall, he pressed upon a knob, which rang a bell.

It was instantly obeyed by some one tapping at the door.

It was the man who had first come out to receive him when he arrived, and whom he addressed by the name of Fennell.

There was a strange mixture of familiarity and deference in this man's manner.

"Is the carriage ready?"

"Waiting, sir."

"Good! be ready to start at a moment's notice. Send Mrs. Lovat."

Fennell disappeared.

Colonel Thorne waited impatiently until she came.

An anxious troubled look was on his face, from which it might be inferred that he had other matters pressing heavily upon his mind than any connected with the poor girl, of whom he had taken so dastardly an advantage.

But the time has not yet arrived, though it is very close at hand, for us to make full disclosures respecting this extraordinary individual.

At length Mrs. Lovat knocked upon the panel of the door, and received permission to enter.

"All is well," said the Colonel. "Have the cloak ready."

"It is here," said Mrs. Lovat, holding up a very large military cloak, which she had carried over her arm.

"That is well."

"Are you sure that she is all right?"

"Oh! yes! Had she drunk only half as much as she did, it would have been sufficient for my purpose."

"Do you start now, sir?"

"Yes, at once. But it is late, is it not?"

"Early, sir."

The colonel consulted his watch.

"Half-past three," he said. "Never mind, it will be some hours yet to day-break. You place the cloak."

Colonel Thorne went to the couch upon which he had laid poor Edgworth Bess, and raised her in his arms.

She was still insensible.

In his hands she was no weight.

Then, while he held her, Mrs. Lovat carefully wrapped the cloak about her form.

It enveloped her completely.

The colonel himself assisted in folding it round her, leaving only her face uncovered, in order that respiration might not be impeded.

Then, when this had been done, he took her up in his arms as though she had been a child, and carried her out of the apartment, Mrs. Lovat holding the door open while he did so.

Across a corridor, and down a spacious staircase with massive carved balusters, and having rare exotic plants placed about it, the colonel went.

There was no one in the hall.

Upon reaching the bottom of the staircase he paused, in order to allow Mrs. Lovat, who was following, to pass him and open the front door.

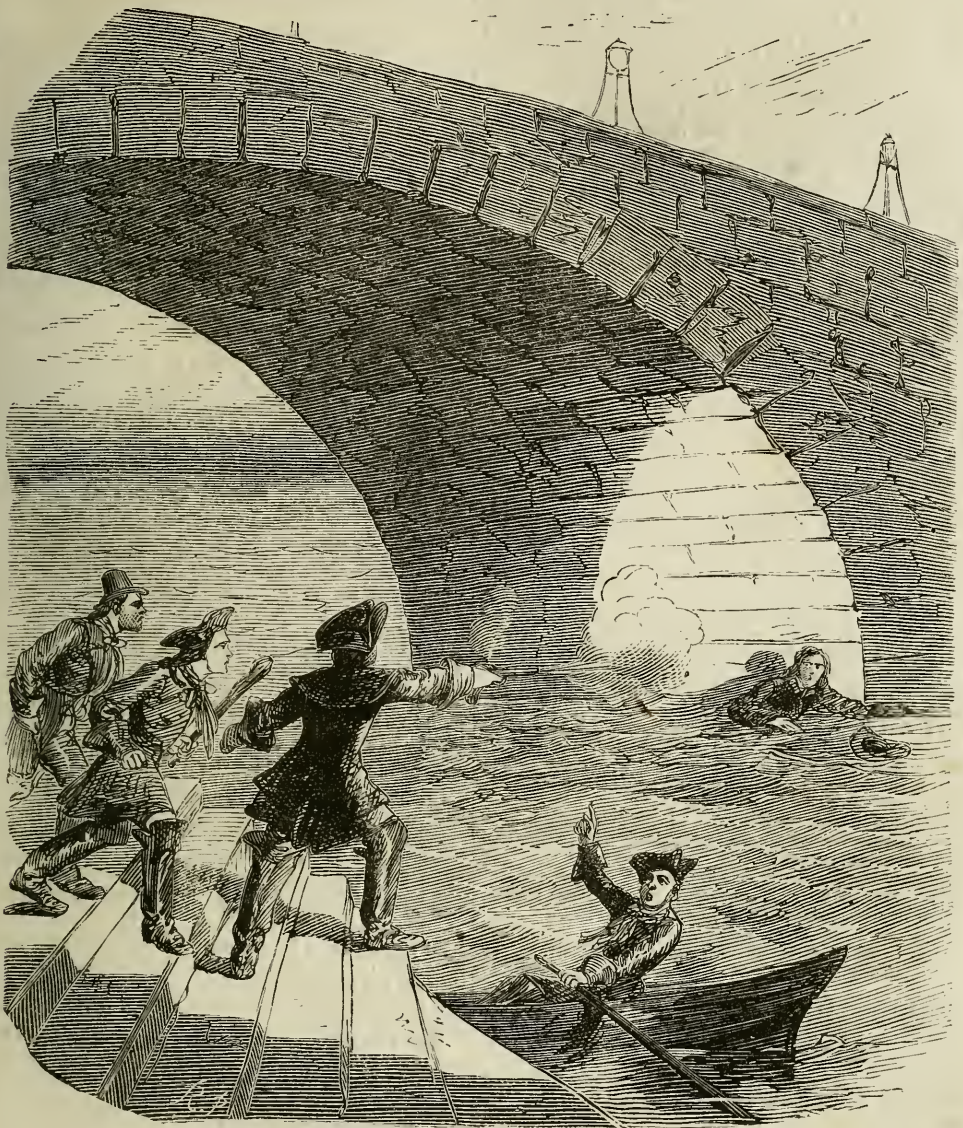
This was done.

A very plain, yet elegant and commodious travelling carriage was drawn close up to the kerb opposite the door.

Four beautiful horses, whose worth represented as many hundreds of guineas, were harnessed to it.

Upon seeing the front door open, Fennell, who was seated in the rumble behind, immediately descended and threw open the door of the carriage.

There was no one in the street at that lonely hour, and the colonel descended the steps in front of his house, crossed the pavement, and entered his carriage unperceived by any but his own creatures.



[JONATHAN WILD FIRES AT BLUESKIN ON THE THAMES.]

Fennell closed the door. Then, mounting the rumble behind, ordered the coachman to drive on.

Their destination was evidently already known to him, for it was not mentioned, and yet he guided his horses round the corner of St. James's-street into Pall-mall, and so on until Westminster-bridge was reached and crossed.

The strong, spirited horses which were harnessed to the vehicle dashed onward over the smooth, well-kept road, at an alarming rate.

At that early hour in the morning it was not likely they would meet or pass many vehicles; nor did they.

Down the broad, open Kent-road they went, then bounded on both sides by tall hedgerows, with pleasant meadows beyond—not as now, one continuous line of brick and mortar.

Poor Edgworth Bess! She is now in the toils of the destroyer.

When we think upon the peril with which she is threatened, and how entirely she is in the power of that

bold bad man, Colonel Thorne, we fairly tremble and turn sick with apprehension.

Her death-like trance or swoon still continued.

The drug which had been dissolved in the wine must have been of a most powerful character, for the poor girl had drank but the smallest possible quantity of it—a tablespoonful at the most—and yet its effects were instantaneous and continued.

She was still enveloped in the ample folds of the cloak, and remained in the same position as that in which she had been placed—namely, in one corner of the carriage.

The colonel was seated by her.

His basilisk eyes were fixed upon that portion of her pretty countenance which the cloak permitted to be visible.

It was only dimly that he saw it, for the lamp in the interior of the carriage emitted but a feeble light.

It was enough, though. His imagination served to supply the rest.

One arm he had around her, without which, or some

similar support, she could not have retained her position, for, excellent as were the springs beneath the carriage, yet, such was the tremendous speed with which it was whirled along, that it swayed violently to and fro, and occasionally there would be a sudden jolt as some obstruction or other was encountered.

And now the reader will be pleased to remember that after their singular adventure with the post-chaise, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, on their return to London, heard some vehicle approaching them.

Blueskin wished to stop it, though, when doing so, he did not for a moment anticipate that any particular result besides obtaining additional booty would arise from it.

As we have related, he very unwillingly allowed himself to be overruled by Jack, and permit the carriage to pass unmolested.

Accordingly, that they might the better escape observation, they retired into the mouth of the lane.

The carriage swept by.

Edgworth Bess at that moment recovered from the lethargic slumber into which the drugged wine had plunged her.

Upon finding herself in such rapid motion, and half in the embrace of a man, who in the faint light she did not recognise, she uttered a loud and awful scream of affright and terror.

That was the sound which had reached the ears of the two watchers in the lane.

Alas! Jack did not know that scream came from the lips of the girl he so fondly loved, and who was even then present in his thoughts.

Little did he dream she was in extreme danger, and within arm's-length of him.

It is astonishing what great results often follow little causes; but so it is, and so it always will be.

Had Jack Sheppard allowed himself to be persuaded by his comrade, he would have brought the carriage to a standstill, and a glance at its interior would have discovered Edgworth Bess.

What, then, would have been more easy than for them to overcome all such resistance as Colonel Thorne might offer, and bear off the poor girl to some safe place of refuge until such measures could be taken as would reinstate her in her possessions.

Then the whole after-current of his life would have been changed, and all the world of misery and shame and grief have been averted.

But fate had decreed it otherwise.

Away flew the carriage, and Jack, when it had passed, set out in an opposite direction to search for her.

How hopeless and how vain a search!

Even in its very commencement most disastrous, for he had fallen into the power of his arch enemy, Jonathan Wild.

But it is not at present with either him or his comrade Blueskin that we have to do. For yet a little longer we will follow the vicissitudinal fortunes of poor Edgworth Bess.

Blueskin had remarked that the shriek which had assailed their ears sounded as though it had been suddenly and violently suppressed; and this was exactly the case, for with an oath, Colonel Thorne placed his hand over her mouth and stilled it.

"Silence!" he said, in a tone of voice so threatening and terrible that Bess felt her heart turn fairly cold, and sink within her; "silence! Utter such a cry again, and it will be your last. Do you hear me? Will you be silent?"

He removed his hand a little, in order that she might reply to him.

But she was silent.

"Speak," he cried again; "give me your word, your promise, that you will continue silent, and I will take it. If you do not, you will drive me to such measures as will compel your silence. Answer me, I say!"

But had her life then and there have depended upon her uttering a syllable, she could not have uttered it.

The colonel, perceiving the state of terror she was in, appeared content, and merely muttered some diabolical threat, if she attempted again to scream out for assistance.

It was just at this moment that a light flashed across the window of the carriage, and then the horses stopped.

The colonel seemed to be perfectly aware of what was taking place. All he did was to look more keenly at his companion.

There was the trampling of horses' hoofs—the sound of voices; but they lasted a moment only, and then the carriage resumed its former pace.

The horses had been changed.

CHAPTER CXVII.

EDGORTH BESS FINDS LITTLE FOOD FOR HOPE IN HER CAPTIVITY.

WITHOUT the occurrence of any incident of special interest deserving of recordation, the carriage containing Colonel Thorne and Edgworth Bess reached that residence belonging to the former of which we have already spoken, and which was known as "The Larches."

Evening shadows were gathering round when they arrived.

Of what kind of place it was to which she was being taken, Edgworth Bess had not the remotest idea, for the colonel kept the carriage-blinds closely drawn down, so that it was not possible for her to obtain a glimpse even of the country through which she passed.

Ever since the threats to which her persecutor had given utterance, she had remained profoundly silent, shrinking as far back into the corner of the carriage as she was able, and fixing her eyes steadfastly and reproachfully upon him.

She was, too, very—very ill. The mere excitement of the scene through which she had so recently passed would be sufficient to induce this, but there was in addition, her weak and wounded state, and the effect which such rapid travelling would be sure to have upon it.

But most of all, there was the agony of spirit under which she laboured.

Could she but have been assured of Jack's safety, one-half of the load which weighed so heavily upon her heart would have been removed. In her imagination she pictured him a prisoner in the hands of the villainous thief-taker, and the inmate of one of his horrible and gloomy cells.

Of her own position she scarcely realized the full danger.

Colonel Thorne sat on the opposite side of the carriage. His head was bent, and his eyes apparently gazing upon nothing, but all the time, though not seeming to do so, he was watching every movement, and every varying expression of the countenance of his fair prisoner with the utmost closeness.

At last he knew by the change in the grinding sound which the carriage-wheels produced, that they had passed through the lodge-gates of his estate, and were traversing the broad gravel carriage-drive leading up to the front-door of his mansion.

But of this Edgworth Bess was herself ignorant. She was too terrified—too ill—and her mind too much occupied with gloomy thoughts, to take notice of such trivial circumstances.

The sudden jerk, however, when the carriage stopped, served to arouse her.

"We have reached our destination," said Colonel Thorne, in his rough, stern voice. "Alight, and make no needless resistance, for it will be quite useless, and, at the same time, futile. You will be seen by none but persons in my pay, and who take no notice of my actions. Alight!"

As he spoke, the carriage-door was opened by some one who held the handle of it in a deferential manner.

It was Fennell.

At the same moment the colonel stretched out his hand, and took hold of Edgworth Bess by the wrist.

To have opposed her strength to his would have been perfectly ridiculous, so, in order to avoid ill-usage, she rose, and suffered herself to be assisted to the ground.

She took a hasty and terrified glance around her, but nothing met her gaze, save a large mansion close to which she stood, a dark surrounding of tall trees, and the blue sky and stars overhead.

There was not the slightest sound to indicate the presence of human beings.

A very short opportunity was allowed her for perceiving

even this transient glimpse, and then she was hurried up a broad stone perron, and through a massive door, into a dimly-lighted vestibule.

"The Larches" was a mansion built somewhat after the picturesque Elizabethan fashion, with large, iron-studded doors; small windows, with diamond panes; innumerable gables, and fantastic chimneys. Its elevation was insignificant; but it rambled over ground enough for half-a-dozen modern commodious dwellings to be built upon its site.

From this vestibule opened several doors, leading into different corridors and apartments, and from the part furthest from the door ascended a winding staircase.

Half fainting with dread, terror, exhaustion, and fatigue, poor Edgworth Bess permitted herself to be led across the vestibule and up the staircase.

A long, long, weary ascent, it seemed, of many hundreds of steps; but that was only her imagination, for the highest apartment in the whole building—and that was the one under the turret upon which the clock was placed, was not more than thirty feet from the ground.

At length the colonel stopped before a door—in size small, in strength remarkable.

It opened, however, with a touch.

The chamber into which it opened was a tolerably spacious one.

It was plainly and scantily furnished.

In one corner was an antique grate, in which a bright fire was burning, and it was chiefly by its ruddy blaze that the different outlines of the apartment could be defined.

The colonel seated Edgworth Bess in a tall, high-back chair, at a comfortable distance from the fire, and then he said—

"At present, this is your residence. Look around you! There is little pleasing to the eye to be seen. In daylight it is even more wretched. Here, then, you will stay until such time as you are disposed to listen to me. But other matters now call for my immediate attention, and so important are they that nothing can detract me from them. But before I leave, let me impress upon you this—you are utterly in my power! Attempt not to escape! Attempt not to ask any one whom you may see to assist you! The result can only be disappointment! Farewell!"

With these words the colonel rose, and left the apartment.

He closed the door behind him.

Instinctively and mechanically Bess turned towards it. She heard a key turned in the lock, and the sharp clicking sound of the bolt as it shot into the socket.

She was, indeed, a prisoner.

And now she sunk into that strange, apathetic state which is sometimes produced by despair.

The different objects wherewith she was surrounded faded from her view.

She did not think—seemed scarcely to exist—and had only a dim consciousness of what had happened.

That the drug she had taken in the wine had a great deal to do with producing the stupifying effect there can be no doubt; and it was assisted by the combination of all those other circumstances which we have a little while back recapitulated.

Whether she remained in this state five minutes or five hours she knew not, but she was aroused by hearing the door unlocked.

It was thrown open.

Upon the threshold appeared a woman of colossal dimensions.

With a swaggering stride this female crossed the room, and put her hand upon Bess's shoulder.

"Get up, miss," she said, in what she, no doubt, intended to be a highly conciliatory tone of voice. "Get up, and come into this room."

"Spare me! spare me!" said the poor girl. "Let me free! I beseech you, let me free! Have mercy upon me, and assist me to leave this hateful place!"

"Hush! hush! you must not speak so! The colonel has commanded me to attend to your every want—treat you with the utmost care, and made me responsible for your safe custody; and when you know the colonel as well as I do, you will find it best not to palter with his commands!"

"Do not drive me to despair!" said Edgworth Bess.

"Do not drive me to despair! Assist me to escape, and I will bless you!"

As she spoke these words, in tones of supplicating anguish, she sunk down upon her knees, and clasped the woman by the hand.

"You will save me, will you not?" she added. "Surely you can feel for my position! Help me, and save me!"

The huge female shook her head.

"You don't know Colonel Thorne! What you ask of me is quite impossible! I dare not assist you to escape! I don't want to be unkind to you, but I cannot assist you in any way."

"Alas! alas!" cried Edgworth Bess, as she let her head fall between her hands, and burst into tears: "What will become of me? Jack! Jack! Where are you? You do not know in what peril I am placed, or you would fly to aid and save me!"

The huge female, although no one would have exactly thought it at first sight, possessed a warm and kindly heart, and compassionated the poor girl who pleaded to her. She endeavoured to utter some words of consolation, but Bess did not need them.

"How is he to know where I am?" she continued. "I do not even know myself! And how truly selfish I am! Even now he may be in greater danger than I am; and what would he do? He would not call for assistance, when he saw assistance there was none; but he would act for himself. And I will do the same."

Edgworth Bess uttered these words aloud, but she was not conscious that she had done so until the woman said—

"Let me advise you to abandon all hopes of making your escape from here. It is impossible. Too many precautions have been taken for that, and so I say again, do not indulge in any such hopes, because they can only end in disappointment. You are weak and weary. I am told you are suffering from many wounds—let me assist you. In the next apartment you will find a bed, and every toilette necessary. Come with me."

Passively Edgworth Bess allowed the woman to take her by the hand and lead her into the adjoining chamber.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

COLONEL THORNE APPEARS UNEXPECTEDLY TO EDG-WORTH BESS, AND ATTEMPTS TO BEND HER TO HIS PURPOSE.

WITH a faint, weary sigh, Edgworth Bess, after a sleep of many hours duration, awoke.

A dull, roaring sound, to which she was unable to make a comparison, reached her ears.

What it was she had no idea.

Never in the whole of her life had she heard anything resembling it.

It was incessant, but not monotonous. Sometimes it would be as faint as a zephyr's breath, and sometimes it would swell into a sound like thunder.

Her awakening could not at first strictly be called such, for she was in the same dreamy, trance-like state as she had been upon her arrival.

But after a time, as she lay there in solitude and silence, she began slowly, and little by little, to regain possession of her faculties.

In the same proportion as she did so, so did she feel better.

She raised herself presently upon one arm and gazed about her.

All was still. There was no person either within sight or hearing.

Then, with an accession of energy, prompted by the desperate nature of her situation, she rose and dressed herself.

She was really astonished to find how strong she was, and by the time she had plentifully bathed her face with water, and drank copiously of the pure fluid, she felt almost if not quite well.

"I will stay here no longer," she said, with that air of resolution which goes so far towards accomplishing an object; "every moment serves to increase my peril and Jack's uneasiness. I will show myself reliant upon my own powers, and it will go hard with me if I do not get free."

While these thoughts passed through her mind, the poor, persecuted girl occupied herself in making an examination of the bed-chamber.

There were two doors opening from it.

One was that through which she had passed, affording the means of communication between the bed-chamber and the outer apartment in which she had first been placed.

This was the door she determined to try first.

It opened to her hand, and this she accepted as an omen of future success.

A small matter will at times make a remarkable and inconceivable difference in the state of one's mind; and slight and probable enough as was the circumstance of her finding the door unfastened, yet it was with a more hopeful heart that she opened it and crossed the threshold.

In the outer, or sitting-room, as it might be called, all things presented precisely the same appearance as they had done on the preceding evening when she first saw it.

With a throbbing heart she hastened to the other door, but this she found secure, and fitting so closely into its setting, that not her whole strength could shake it in the least.

To a certain extent she was prepared for this; nevertheless she could not control a feeling of disappointment.

Subduing it, however, as much as she was able, she crossed the room in the direction of the windows.

It will be remembered that at present she had not looked out of them, and now, when she did so, a cry of surprise, slightly mingled with pleasure, came from her lips.

Before her, and stretching in every direction as far as her eye could reach, was the sea!

Yes, there could be no doubt of that. She had never before gazed upon the ocean; indeed, from the manner in which she had lived and been brought up, knew little, if anything, about it; but, for all that, she instinctively recognized it, and knew what it was.

The sun was shining with unusual brightness for the dull season of the year, and his beams fell upon the slightly-agitated water like myriads of diamonds.

The two words which Bess uttered upon this unexpected sight being presented to her view will best describe its character.

"How beautiful!"

And now she gradually comprehended the sound for which she had found herself so completely at a loss to account.

It was the dashing of the sea against the shore.

The mansion—for such it was—was one of the largest, and built upon the summit of one of those tall white cliffs which make the shores of England so conspicuous to those approaching them from foreign lands.

The sea was far below it, more so than it appeared to any one in the position of Edgworth Bess to be, but in reality the cliff was upwards of two hundred feet above the level of the water.

The constant alteration of the restless tide had worn deep indentations in the chalky rocks, and into these, the waves dashed with great fury, producing the deep hollow, roaring sound.

For some minutes Edgworth Bess was so enchanted with the scene before her that she lost sight of the purpose for which she had in the first instance approached the window.

But suddenly recollecting herself, she lifted her hand to try the fastenings.

As she did so she was startled by a deep voice at her elbow, which said—

"It is useless!"

Turning round suddenly she saw, standing close beside her, within arm's length, her new and much-to-be-dreaded persecutor, Colonel Thorne.

The absolute terror which his unexpected and inexplicable appearance produced, made the poor girl for a minute or so speechless and motionless. She could only gaze with a horrified stare upon his stern, implacable-looking countenance.

The colonel slowly, but significantly shook his head.

"It is useless!" he repeated, "utterly useless! You cannot escape. The doors are fast, and so are the windows. You are my prisoner, and wholly in my power!"

"And by what right am I your prisoner?" asked Edgworth Bess, recovering herself, and assuming, with difficulty, a manner altogether foreign to her nature. "Answer me. By what right am I your prisoner?"

These bold words, and, moreover, the bold manner in which she uttered them, caused her eyes to sparkle, her cheeks to flush, and her whole frame to tremble.

"Ha! ha!"

That was the only reply Colonel Thorne made to her question.

It was a mocking laugh, and, as it came from his lips, he folded his arms, and looked, with a still more ludicrous expression, into her countenance.

But Bess felt firmer.

The reply she met did not, as might have been expected, dishearten her.

"Tell me," she said, "as you are a man, and as I have a right to ask, why am I your prisoner? By what right?"

"The right of power," replied the colonel, in his bass voice, which was not destitute of a peculiar melody of its own. "The right which the strong has over the weak. You are in my hands. I can do with you as I choose, and there is nothing which can or shall step between me and my desires."

Bess trembled.

But ere she could command her voice to speak, the colonel continued—

"From the first moment that my eyes lighted upon your countenance, I loved you. I do so now, and in that fact discover, if you can, the motive, the mainspring of my conduct. I love you; not as nine-tenths of those who profess to feel the passion do, but with the ardency of my nature. I say I love you, and where my inclinations are concerned I allow nothing to step in between me and my desires. I am rich—wealthy beyond all your dreams of wealth—and, consequently, possessed of no ordinary amount of power, which I can wield as the humour takes me. You are a prisoner. Secure, beyond even the faintest chance or probability of escape. Dismiss, therefore, that idea from your mind at once."

Every sentence which this speech contained, uttered as the whole was with extraordinary force, made Edgworth Bess feel as though a death knell had been struck to all her hopes of freedom.

The confident manner of the colonel had its full effect.

"You have heard my avowal," he said. "It remains for you to think it over. You have your choice, either to comply with my wishes, and return my love, or compel me to use force. In the former case you shall be happy. Every want which you can frame shall be supplied almost ere you have given it utterance. I will do my utmost to show the love I bear you. But if, on the other hand—mark me—you know—I need not describe!"

"You need not," cried Bess, passionately, "you need not. I love another. One who is as different to you as tempest is to calm—one to whom I will prove true under all circumstances, and through all time. The only sentiment I have for you is loathing and abhorrence. What little good feeling there might have been in my heart for you, your behaviour to me has utterly extinguished, and I would rather die a hundred—nay, a thousand—times, than consent to be the thing you wish to make me."

The appearance of the poor girl, as she thus spoke, was truly majestic and beautiful.

But that of the colonel was of the most deadly and ungovernable rage. To be thus bearded by a girl was what he would never suffer. He who had been accustomed to see the rudest men bow down before him, and instantly obey his slightest wish.

"Rash girl!" he cried, his voice almost choked with rage. "You shall repent of this, and when it is too late, you will wish you had treated me with more consideration! You have made your choice, and you must abide by it!"

An awful scream burst from the lips of Edgworth Bess, as the colonel, while speaking these last words, suddenly darted forward, and clasped her in his arms.

CHAPTER CXIX.

COLONEL THORNE'S CONDUCT BECOMES MYSTERIOUS.

VAINLY did she struggle and implore for succour. In his hands she was but a feather in those of a child, and, alas! there was none near to hear her cries who would obey her summons for assistance.

Such a sensation of deadly sickness came over her, that she was deprived of what little strength she had.

Her head swam round.

Her eyes dimmed.

She lost all power of using her voice, and sank upon her knees.

"Now do you believe you are in my power!" cried the colonel, hoarsely. "What is there to step in between us? All your frantic cries have met with no response. All your struggles have only served to show your weakness. But I am unwilling to master you thus. I love you, and would fain win back your love in return. Say, will you give me hope?"

"Never!"

"Then you shall rue your refusal. I will let you know, girl, that I am one in command! I have beneath me, and subsistent to my slightest wish, fiercer and more untamable spirits than yours. Reflect! Surely it can need no reflection! or, if you think so, I will give you a few hours for the consideration of my offer."

"It is useless."

Such were the words that rose to the lips of Edgworth Bess, but she took a rapid second thought, and did not utter them.

If she put him off, she would gain time, and time to her might be life, escape, everything.

"Leave me, then!" she said, instead. "Leave me, and I will try to reconcile myself to my lot."

"Is it possible that you consent? That you give me room to hope that I may hope to win you for my own? Ha! confusion! curses!"

The sudden exclamations that came from the lips of Colonel Thorne proceeded apparently from a very simple cause, and, at all events, it would have been thought from one totally inadequate to produce such an effect.

What was the cause?

All that Bess heard was a clock strike the hour of three. The sound appeared to come from overhead.

But why should such a seemingly simple and natural occurrence produce the effect it did?

She was lost in conjecture.

She fixed her eyes earnestly upon her persecutor.

He had released her hands from the hold he had taken of them, and drawn himself up to his full height.

He stood in the attitude of one who expected to hear more.

Nor had he long to wait, for again the clock proclaimed the hour of three.

This was mysterious and remarkable.

What could it mean?

She had thought before, not only from the colonel's manner, but from the time she imagined it was, that the clock had not pealed forth the proper hour.

And now she could hardly think it was a clock at all, for certainly no clock would strike the same hour twice in succession, and with an interval of about a moment only.

What could it mean?

Again the clock struck.

The colonel seemed much agitated.

"I will leave you!" he said. "I will leave you! Consider well all that I have said! Do not allow yourself to be led away by any hopes of getting free! Once for all, and all for once, I tell you it is impossible! I must leave you now!" he repeated. "But look, what is that yonder?"

He pointed through the window, as he spoke.

With a natural instinct, Edgworth Bess looked immediately in the direction in which he pointed.

There was nothing but the bright blue sea before her.

Then she heard the door leading into the room in which she had passed the night shut violently.

With a boldness, for which no one would have given her credit, she ran across the room, and, turning the handle of the door, opened it, for it was not secured in any way.

But when she entered the bedroom, although not a

moment elapsed from the time she heard the door slammed, no living creature could be seen.

She looked round twice or thrice, but all was undisturbed, and just as she had left, nor was there any trace which would lead one to suppose that it had been recently entered.

Bewildered and alarmed, Bess sank down into a chair, and, clasping her hands tightly about her head, strove to calm her mind, and think dispassionately of the occurrences of the last two or three hours.

She found the task a difficult one.

"How came he to enter here so silently and unperceived as he did?" she asked herself; "for when he spoke behind me I had no idea of his presence; and, then, how did he leave? His pointing to the window was only a device to conceal the means by which he departed. And why did he slam the door? Was that to mislead me again? I must think—I must think."

For a long while Edgworth Bess remained in deep meditation, and then she rose to her feet.

There was an air of decision about her which she had not previously displayed.

"I will make a careful examination of this place," she said. "I have good grounds for doing so. I feel convinced there are some other means of leaving these apartments than by the strong and firmly-fastened door through which I was brought. No doubt this other door—if door it is—depends entirely upon its secrecy for its security. So I will be diligent, and search."

She was impelled to do this with all the greater expedition, for she found, from the decreased amount of light that came into the room, that night was fast approaching. Therefore, what she had to do, it behoved her to do quickly.

Returning to the outer room, in which she had had her terrible interview with Colonel Thorne, she made a minute examination of every part of it.

But all her trouble met with no reward. She was unable to find anything like a secret means of ingress or egress, and so, with the utmost reluctance, she passed into the bed-chamber, and made a rigid examination of that also.

Floor, walls, and every part was scrutinized with a minuteness that one would have thought more than sufficient to cause the discovery of the most cunningly contrived hiding-place, but alas! for her hopes of escape, the result was just the same.

And now she came to that other door in her bedroom which she had several times seen, but through which she had never attempted to penetrate.

Her hand trembled, and her heart palpitated as she turned the knob.

Somewhat to her surprise, she found it give way before her touch.

She flung the door wide open.

But she did not venture to cross the threshold until she had first taken a glance at its interior.

In the first place, there did not seem to be so much light in this room as there was in the three others.

And such was indeed the case, for it was smaller in size, and there was but one window.

The day, too, was still declining, which made it all the more manifest.

But, whatever might have been the mysteries of that room, Edgworth Bess was not yet destined to explore them.

For one thing there was not light enough to enable her to properly examine it, and, just as she was about to enter it, the outermost door opened.

In a moment she sprang forward to see who it was.

It was the huge female.

She carried in her hand a small tray, upon which a tempting repast was laid.

This she placed upon the table.

Bess looked at the viands wistfully.

It was a long, long time since she had tasted food, and she felt faint and sick in consequence.

Whoever the woman might be, and however repulsive her outward form might appear to be, she had a tender heart, and, had it not been for the terror in which she stood of Colonel Thorne, she would certainly have assisted our heroine to escape.

As it was, she could not bear to hear her supplications for aid and help. They cut her to the heart, and so she

was glad enough to be able to place the things upon the table without a repetition of the former scene, and she left the room, after having done so, with the greatest precipitation, determined to give Bess no more chance of speaking to her than she could help.

And Edgworth Bess had not heart to renew her entreaties.

The door was closed and locked.

The receding footsteps of the bulky female became inaudible.

As she gazed upon the viands so temptingly displayed before her, poor Bess could not help feeling the cravings of hunger very, very strongly.

But she was afraid to gratify them.

The remembrance of the drugged wine arose up like some horrible phantom in her imagination.

And yet this might be untampered with, and, besides, she asked herself if she denied herself food, how was she to hope to have strength enough to carry out her purpose, or embrace any opportunity of escape that might be offered to her.

Under the influence of these thoughts, she looked more closely at the different eatables upon the tray.

Conspicuous above all was a small cake of wheaten bread.

"Surely," she said, as she took it in her hands, "no harm or poisonous drug can be concealed in this. I may eat of it without fear. At any rate, I will run the risk, for my position is now so bad it cannot, by any possibility, be made much worse."

So saying, she took the cake.

It was whole, and nowhere in the crust could she see any signs of its having been tampered with, and so she ventured to break off a portion and eat it.

To her it tasted sweeter than it was in reality.

The taste, however, convinced her that all was well, and she ate of it heartily.

Just as she had finished her meal, the last ray of daylight faded from the room, leaving her in sudden and utter darkness.

CHAPTER CXX.

RELATES SOME PARTICULARS CONNECTED WITH CAPTAIN HOWLET, THE PIRATE.

No doubt the reader, like poor Edgworth Bess, feels no inconsiderable amount of curiosity to know why the clock—if clock it was—should strike so eccentrically, and why it produced the effect it did upon Colonel Thorne.

The idea that it was a signal of some kind will readily occur to the imagination. But what kind of signal could it be to make him withdraw at the moment when it would seem he had succeeded in making a favourable impression?

By what mysterious means, too, had he managed to leave the chamber almost instantaneously, and without leaving any trace behind?

These questions will, in good time, be answered, as well as many strange particulars given of this man, in every sense of the word remarkable.

But in order to do this fully, and to lay before the reader a clear account of all, it will be necessary, for a time, to leave our characters where they are, and take up the thread of the narrative at another point.

In doing this, we promise to occupy no more space than comprehension allows us, and the reader will find the episode we are about to lay before him the most interesting and unparalleled in the whole history.

At the time, then, of which we are writing, the North Sea and the English Channel were much infested with pirates, who, setting every law and principle of humanity at defiance, and eluding every attempt made to capture them, struck terror into the hearts of all those who, from necessity, navigated the seas.

But among the numerous horde there was one who made himself and his vessel conspicuous and pre-eminent above the rest by the desperate nature of his deeds, and the success which invariably attended what he took in hand.

The name and fame of this celebrated pirate were spread far and wide, and many a stout heart trembled when the atrocities of himself and crew were mentioned.

For many long years had their depredations been successfully carried on. There were some few who existed

who had been attacked by them and escaped with life; but very few indeed, for it was a part of the policy of these pirates to slay every one who came into their hands.

In some mysterious manner the name of their leader got whispered abroad.

It was Captain Howlet. Sometimes, however, the title was dropped, and he was called simply the Howlet, which, as many of our readers may perhaps be aware, from the fact of its being in provincial use, is an old Anglo-Norman word, used to designate the large white or barn-owl.

Why he had assumed this name was considered obvious. Like an owl, he was only heard of by night, and it was then he sought his prey.

But there were others who said that this name was not of his own assumption, but that it had been bestowed upon him for the convenience of distinction by the authorities.

These called him the Owllet, and derived the word from the law term to owl (*i.e.*, carry on a contraband or unlawful trade).

But which of these was right can only be unfolded by time, and the reader is at liberty for the present to espouse the hypothesis of either.

Be it how it may, however, Captain Howlet, the pirate, was the terror of the English and adjacent coasts. The most incredible stories respecting himself and his vessel were afloat. Those who had been fortunate enough to escape from the clutches of the crew, described him as a man of gigantic stature and superhuman strength; and that the faces of his crew and himself were covered with masks of a peculiar and terrifying description, being wrought into the semblance of owls' heads.

Then, as for the vessel! No fairy bark could ever have achieved the feats that were ascribed to it. It flew through the water with the velocity of an arrow, enabling it to come up with its prey and escape from danger.

And certainly this latter power the pirate vessel seemed to have, for hitherto it had defied all efforts made to capture it.

Ships and men had been specially dispatched on the mission, but all had returned baffled and defeated, while the daring deeds of Captain Howlet were heard of almost daily.

And now, when we have said so much, we have put the reader into possession of all the facts the public or any one else had respecting these notorious buccaneers. There may be a few other details, but they are trivial ones, and unsupported by authority.

There were times, however, when nothing would be heard of Captain Howlet and his crew. Vessels would arrive and depart in safety; confidence would begin to be restored, and then he would suddenly appear again, to the terror and confusion of those who thought to make their voyage unmolested.

Nor were his depredations confined to one spot. He would one day be heard of cruising about the entrance to the Bay of Biscay, and the next he would scuttle a vessel in the German Ocean; then again he would appear off the English coast.

And so it will be seen that all that was known of him was vague, unsatisfactory, and mysterious.

But that which appeared so mysterious will quickly be made manifest to our readers.

Not very far from Dover there was, in the face of one of the huge precipitous cliffs, a cleft or indentation; and as the cliff spoken of rose sheer from the water's edge, it was not possible for this to be perceived, except from the deck of some ship or boat passing that spot.

When at that distance—for there was nothing in the appearance of the place to cause any one to wish to make a closer investigation—it differed in no respect from hundreds of cracks or fissures which diversified the cliffs, and of which the widest and deepest were known to be only a few feet in width and depth.

But the one to which we now direct attention was different to its companions, but not in height, width, or general appearance.

Upon taking a small boat, and rowing quite close up to it, no difference would be perceptible.

You might even row into the little cavernous-like place. You would then have found that it extended a little more than the boat's length.

Here the solid wall of the cliff would be found to be a into a thousand hollows by the curious, restless waves.

The one side would produce a similar appearance, so far as solidity went, and so would the other.

The most careful scrutiny would not reveal an inlet.

But there was one.

And now, having examined the three sides of the cavern, the explorer would probably turn his eyes upwards to the roof.

It would, except at high tide, be very many feet above him.

Quite out of reach, and too high up for him to see it distinctly.

Could he have ascended, it is there he would have found the inlet.

Yet it was concealed as carefully as possible; no casual glance would have discovered it.

That this was the pirates' secret haunt the reader must already suspect.

This indentation was at the base of the cliff upon the summit of which Colonel Thorne's residence, "The Larches," was situated.

A man so wealthy as the colonel seemed to be was, of course, well known and much noticed by those who resided in the neighbourhood.

His horses, his dogs, and his equipages were the delight and admiration of all who were fortunate enough to behold them.

In one word, they were faultless.

Among his other possessions of this character was a beautifully-built yacht, but although this was the most admired of all, yet it appeared to be the one of which he made the least use, and of which he took the least notice.

It was nearly always to be seen riding at anchor at a short distance from the land; but as it is well known that things wear out most when not in use, so the men in charge of this yacht used at times to cruise off for days together.

And now, while we are speaking of the colonel and his possessions, we may as well take the opportunity of describing briefly the outward appearance of his dwelling.

Doing so at this juncture will spare us the necessity of interrupting the narration of events, for in order to properly understand that which follows, it is requisite that a correct notion of its appearance should be had.

We have already said that it was a long, low, rambling edifice, built in the Elizabethan style of architecture. The material used in its erection was a grayish-coloured stone, only a few shades darker than the cliff forming its foundation.

The mansion was uniformly two stories in height, except in one portion near the centre of the building, where it rose another story, and was then surmounted by an antique clock-tower, or turret.

The upper portion of this turret—that is to say, above the clock—was dome-like in shape, carrying upon its highest part a ball and cross, in all respects, save that of size, resembling those which crowned the spires of so many of our cathedrals.

From its elevated position being not only double the height of the surrounding building, which in its lowest part was nearly three hundred feet above the level of the sea, it was a most conspicuous object when seen from the land, but still more so when viewed from the sea, whence it could be distinguished at a distance of very many miles.

Strange to say, this part of the colonel's abode was suffered to go to ruin and decay. The other portions, so soon as they required it, were carefully repaired; this belfry or clock-tower was alone neglected.

For what reason no one could conjecture. It certainly had the effect of spoiling the appearance of the whole, and those who enjoyed the acquaintance of the colonel, one and all, knew him to be a man who would brook no idle questions upon such a subject.

Having explained so far, we will now proceed to direct the attention of the reader to a scene of the wildest and most startling interest.

CHAPTER CXXI.

THE PIRATE CREW PROCEED TO EXECUTE SUMMARY JUSTICE UPON THE SPY.

"A SPY! a spy! Down with him! Slay him! Knock him on the head with a marling-spike! Let him have it!

Death to the spy! Will Ogden he calls himself! Down with Will Ogden! Down with him! Death! death!"

These words came from many a fierce throat, and were uttered with gesticulations of ungovernable rage.

Those who uttered them were men dressed in a semi-nautical costume.

They had all seized upon one man, who, in the most abject terror, had sank upon his knees.

His countenance proclaimed his guilt, and gave the lie to the words which fell falteringly from his lips.

He was dressed in a similar manner to those who made use of such threatening language and gestures towards him.

The scene was a large cavernous apartment.

Irregular in shape.

Unequal in height.

The sides and roof composed of calcareous rock.

The floor of bright glittering sand and sea shells.

The extent of the place could be seen by the lamps which were hung at uncertain intervals around it.

It was probably a quarter of an acre.

In five places five very large lamps were suspended by a chain from the ceiling, and as each carried several wicks, the place was tolerably well illuminated.

Of course, to any one coming in fresh out of the sunshine, it would have seemed dark and gloomy enough, but to those who had been in it for some time there was sufficient light to enable them to distinguish anything.

"A rope! a rope!" cried the men again. "Put a rope round his neck and run him up! That is the death for a traitor and a spy! Death! death! A rope! a rope!"

"Here you are, mates!" said a voice; "here's as taut a line as you could wish to see! Don't loose him! hold him tight! Here, Joe, you help me."

The speaker, a short, burly seaman, who, as soon as the rope was mentioned, separated himself from the turbulent throng, and returned with the article demanded.

With true sailor-like dexterity he formed one end into a running noose; then going to one side of the cavern, where a large hook projected from the wall, he, after two or three attempts, succeeded in throwing the end of the rope over it.

The one he had called to his assistance understood without being told what was required of him, and from one of the many little recesses round the side of the place he rolled an empty barrel.

Its appearance was hailed with a shout of delight by the others.

To place it on end just underneath the hook took him but a moment, and then all was ready; for while this was going forward those who held the poor trembling wretch in their grasp, had pinioned his arms behind him.

Then, in spite of his frantic cries and struggles, they lifted him bodily upon the on-end cask.

By blows they forced him to stand upright.

Then the noose was slipped over his head, and drawn tight about his neck.

The burly seaman took hold of the other end.

"Now then, mates, say the word and up he goes, like an angel. Are you ready?"

"Mercy! have mercy!" cried the man; "spare my life—spare it, and I will confess all! Mercy! mercy! you make a mistake! All of you make a mistake! I am innocent—indeed, I am."

"We are ready," exclaimed the other sailors; "Up with him, Ben! I'll bear a hand. Now, then, one!"

In a perfect yell, which penetrated to every nook and corner of the cavern, and aroused many a slumbering echo, the poor wretch so close to death shrieked out the one word—

"Mercy!"

"Two!"

"Mercy!" he shrieked again, with even, if possible, more violence than before. "Mercy! Mr. Morgan! Mr. Morgan! You will put a stop to this. Spare me—spare me! Mercy! oh! mercy!"

From his elevated position the accused was able to see over the heads of his late comrades, and perceived a person approaching, with wonder and anger in his looks.

It was the lieutenant, or second in command of the band, assembled in the cavern.

The name by which he had addressed him was the one

by which he was known to the stern beings he had under his command.

"Hold!" he cried, in a loud and imperative voice.

The band was still in a moment.

The one who was about to pronounce the word three, let the sound die away upon his lips in a whisper.

The man who was ready to obey the signal slackened the rope slightly.

"Oh! Mr. Morgan! Mr. Morgan!" cried the one who, rightfully or wrongfully, had been accused of being a spy, and who gathered some hope from the appearance of the lieutenant. "You know me, Mr. Morgan. Will Ogden! To be sure you know Will Ogden. Spare me!—save me! They call me a traitor and spy, and wish my death. But I am innocent—innocent! Mercy—mercy!"

"Peace!—peace! Not another word. What is the meaning of all this? Come forward, some of you, and speak. Not all of you at once."

"I will tell you, Mr. Morgan. I will tell you. Indeed, I will tell you all," cried the man with the rope around his neck.

Lieutenant Morgan looked at him angrily.

"Silence, I say! Let me not hear your voice again. It seems to me that they have discovered you to be a spy. I am not surprised, and am inclined to believe it, for I have long had my suspicions of you. So I warn you, for your own sake, to be silent."

After these words, the poor wretch seemed to collapse, and he sank down on the head of the cask as low as the rope would allow him.

"Will you let me speak, sir," said a man, coming forward from the rest of the throng, and saluting the lieutenant.

"Certainly, Batson, certainly."

"Well, then, it fell out this ways. As Tom Drotchel, yonder, was walking across the cave, we noticed a paper fall from his pocket, or somewhere else about him. Thinking it might be from some lass, or to one, for that matter, we thought to have a bit of fun with him, knowing what a surly chap he in general is, so, without saying a word, I got up and walked to where the letter was lying on tip-toe, and picked it up unperceived. I went to look at it, but I couldn't make out the lingo, so I gave it to Joe Dudley, and asked him to spell it out to the company."

"Well, what then?"

"That's all, sir; and, with your leave, my mate, Joe Dudley, will tell you the rest."

"Good! Stand aside, Dudley."

"Yes, your honour."

"Go on with the story."

"Yes, your honour. Well, as Batson said, I thought to have some fun, so I began to read the letter; but, my stars! what do you think it were? Shall I read it to you, your honour?"

"Yes, and then all may hear."

"Ay—ay, your honour."

The lieutenant gave this permission because he could not read himself; indeed, the man Dudley was the only one possessed of that accomplishment.

"It's a first-rate hand, sir. That was the first thing I looked at; and not such as we should turn out, however."

"RESPECTED SIR,—

"The suspicions which I had the honour of communicating to you have turned out to be no more than fact. At great trouble and risk I have succeeded in joining the pirate-band, and write this in their secret haunt, of the existence of which they do not dream any one but themselves has the least idea. However, it is beyond all doubt that the much-dreaded and mysterious pirate, known as Captain Howlet, is no other than Colonel Thorne, the owner and occupier of the mansion called 'The Larches.' Of this I have abundant proof, having seen him frequently in both characters. The cavern in which the pirates conceal themselves is hollowed out of the cliff upon which the house stands, and there is a secret means of communication between the two, known only to the captain himself. The means by which you will find it best to make an attack, I have yet to learn; but as soon as I possess the knowledge, I will take care that no time is lost in making you aware of all particulars. I should not have written now, only I thought you would feel anxious to hear something respecting me. So no more at present from
GEORGE HAWKINS."

There was perfect silence while Joe Dudley read this

precious epistle, which seemed to place the guilt of the prisoner beyond all doubt.

Lieutenant Morgan looked sternly at him during the whole of the time occupied by the perusal.

For the life of him the poor abject wretch could not bear his gaze.

He turned his eyes away.

"A traitor—a traitor," cried the pirates; "hang him up—hang him up! Quick! Let not the villain live!"

Lieutenant Morgan held up his hand.

"Hold," he said. "Silence, all. This is very serious business, and there is one above us all who ought not to remain in ignorance of it any longer. Let him decide his fate."

"The Howlet—the Howlet!" cried the pirates, as with one voice. "The Howlet!"

"Yes," continued Morgan. "I will summon our brave captain, who will best know how to deal with such as he is. Silence, all, and wait his coming."

As he spoke, the lieutenant went to a small recess in the cavern side, and put some machinery or other in motion.

Then he advanced to the centre and waited.

There would have been a breathless silence had it not been for the convicted spy.

A few minutes elapsed, and then, from the darkest portion of the cavern, came a tall and commanding figure.

When it reached the light it presented an appearance awful in the extreme.

It was a man of gigantic stature, with the head of a huge owl.

CHAPTER CXXII.

BLUESKIN IS FIRED AT BY JONATHAN WILD, AND HAS TO SWIM DOWN THE THAMES FOR HIS LIFE.

FAIR or sterner reader of this record of love, of trial, of temptation, of crime, of sin, of violence, of suffering, of treachery, of courage, and all the attributes which disfigure human nature, turn back with us for a little while, during which we will occupy ourselves with the fortunes of three of our chief characters.

Leaving the mysterious-looking pirate chief to mete out such justice to the traitor in his band as he may think proper, and leaving the poor wretch to make abject supplications for his life.

Leaving, too, Edgworth Bess in her dangerous captivity, let us take up the thread of our narrative at that point when Jack Sheppard was made a prisoner upon Blackfriars-bridge, and where Blueskin only escaped a similar fate by the desperate feat of leaping from the parapet of the bridge into the river.

It will no doubt be well remembered by the reader that Jonathan Wild, the moment he saw this daring act performed, shouted to his men to keep strict guard over their prisoner, while the remainder followed him.

Then, with the recklessness of insanity, he dashed down the broad flight of slippery stone steps leading from the bridge to the water, those steps which are even now about to be swept away.

The receding tide had left the stones wet, and it is a thousand wonders that in his headlong descent Wild did not lose his footing.

But he did not.

He reached the bottom step in safety.

Then he strove to pierce with straining eyes the dense mist which hung upon the surface of the water.

A boatman, too, who had been for hours in expectation of a fare, roused up from the sleep into which he had fallen, and just guiding his little wherry to the foot of the steps in front of where Wild stood, he cried out, in sleepy tones—

"Boat, your honour, boat. Do you want a boat, your honour?"

But Wild was too much occupied just at that moment either to hear or heed his words.

As the man asked the question, one of those natural phenomena occurred, which, though common enough, are rarely seen by human eyes.

As if by the magic influence of an enchanter's wand, the dense mist suddenly dissolved—disappeared.

Nor did it leave the least trace to show that it had been, except in the far distance, where it could be seen curling up and vanishing with great rapidity.

And then the rising sun cast his beams upon the waters.



[EDGORTH BESS HAS A PERILOUS ADVENTURE IN ATTEMPTING TO ESCAPE FROM COLONEL THORNE.]

But by neither of these did Wild suffer his attention to be diverted.

His eyes were fixed upon the Thames.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation, and drawing a pistol with great rapidity from his belt, he fired.

His eagle glance had caught sight of Blueskin's head near the buttress of the bridge.

To see this, take aim at it, and fire, seemed simultaneous actions, so little interval was there between them, so little time did the whole occupy.

The sharp report of the pistol was followed by a cry.

Then the head disappeared.

"By heaven! I have hit him!" cried Wild, exultingly. "I have hit him! Now, where's your infernal boat? Quick! and I shall have him yet!"

But the waterman, somewhat dismayed by these summary proceedings, and immediately forming a natural dread of so violent an individual, backed water, and got out of reach.

"Villain!" roared Jonathan, "your boat! Quick, or

it will be the worse for you. Do you hear? I command you in the king's name! I am Jonathan Wild."

Upon hearing this declaration, the terror of the waterman visibly increased, but he did not dare refuse to obey the thief-taker, so he rowed again to the foot of the steps, mentally cursing himself for having woke up as he did.

Wild sprang hastily into the boat, followed by his two men.

By his directions the waterman rowed to the projection of the bridge near which he had seen Blueskin's head disappear.

Then he stood up in the boat, and looked closely about him.

For full a moment he gazed vainly. Nothing could he see but the chill dreary waste of waters everywhere around him.

There was a strong current of air underneath the bridge, apparently carrying a number of watery particles, and as it swept with full force against and past the inmates of the boat, it seemed to chill them to the bone.

All shivered save Jonathan Wild, and he was too intent upon what he was about to take cognizance of any other circumstance.

But, for all that, one moment was sufficient to load his hair and apparel with moisture.

The tide was flowing out, so it was down the river that Jonathan looked, under the full impression that he should again see the head of his ancient coadjutor and ally.

Should he do so, he had a pistol ready in his grasp, and that he would not hesitate to favour him with its contents there cannot be a doubt, for Blueskin knew too much, and was too deeply in many of his secrets, to make it safe for him to live as Jonathan's avowed enemy.

It was probable enough that the first shot he had fired was an effective one, but, if so, the body would in a little time rise to the surface, and this time he determined not to depart without assuring himself that he really was no more.

Already had he had sufficient evidence to prove that Blueskin had a cranium of no ordinary thickness, and that he had as many chances of his life as a cat, and so, on this occasion, he determined to be more than ordinarily particular.

"Look about you, you villains!" he roared to his men, finding himself unable to distinguish anything resembling what he looked for. "Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild, sir, if you please," replied the janizaries, their teeth chattering with the intensely raw cold.

"Then can you see anything? Ha! what is that? There he is!"

Bang! went Wild's pistol.

Something in the distance had caught his eye, and caused him to give vent to the hasty exclamation he did.

The moment he saw it he fired.

Then, without waiting to see whether he had accomplished any good by his hasty aim, he cried—
"Row—row! Yonder—yonder! Quick, I will guide you!"

In obedience to these hurried and imperious commands, the waterman let fall his oars over the sides of the boat, and rowed with all the vigour which the muscles of his arms would permit in the direction Wild indicated.

The smoke from the discharged pistol hung lazily about the surface of the river for some seconds, gradually diffusing itself until it became of such extreme tenuity that it was no longer visible.

As soon as this was the case, it was with a voice of terrible exultation that Wild cried—

"I see him! There he goes! Look—look! Keep him in sight, whatever you do! We are sure to overtake him! Faster—faster! We shall have him yet!"

The waterman began to feel some kind of personal interest in the chase, which was no more than natural, although he had been so frightened at first, but there is a contagious excitement in chasing anything, no matter, whether beast or man, which seems to be an inherent quality in the breasts of human beings.

Bending his back, then, to his task, and exerting his utmost strength, he gave most vigorous long and lusty strokes, which caused the little bark to bound over the mimic waves upon the Thames with a speed that was really marvellous.

But of this Jonathan, who stood in the prow of the boat, was unconscious. To him the progress of the boat seemed tediously slow.

His eyes were riveted upon a small dark object drifting down the river with the tide.

Nothing, he resolved, let it be what it might, should induce him to remove his gaze even for a single moment, lest in that moment he should lose sight of what he had before so anxiously sought to see.

And now, as the morning got more and more advanced and the daylight brighter, he was all the better able to perceive the object in the water, and, at last, there could be no possibility of doubt that it was the head of a human being.

Despite, however, all the efforts which the boatman made, they did not gain very perceptibly upon it.

Wild had not another pistol loaded, or he would assuredly have fired again, and, so great was his excitement, that the thought did not occur to him either to order his janizaries to fire, or ask them for one of their pistols.

But soon the agitation and excitement which Wild had felt increased to an unbearable extent, for the swiftly-floating object was approaching the numerous vessels which were moored off the Surrey side of old London-bridge.

Once among the shadows and intricacies of those, Wild felt certain that all hopes of recovering him would be futile. To use an old and familiar illustration, it would be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay.

"Row!" he yelled, and his voice sounded with remarkable distinctness over the silent river; for as yet the hour was too early for any of the craft to be in motion. "Row!—curse you—row! or he will escape us! If he reaches the boats he is lost."

And so seemed to think the swimmer, for his speed could be seen to perceptibly increase.

No doubt the so close prospect of safety nerved his failing powers to fresh exertion.

Perspiration poured from the head and face of the waterman, but all was useless, for in another moment the swimmer disappeared behind a huge, clumsy vessel.

"Damnation!" roared Wild. "But I will not give in yet. Ha! there he goes again! Fool that he was not to make the most of such a chance! Why, he seems to be swimming towards us."

And such was the case.

Whether the wounds he had received from Wild's bullets had bewildered his brain, or whether he had been seized with a sudden insanity, we know not; but certain it is, that the swimmer now left the shelter of the boats he had seemed so anxious to gain, and was swimming towards Wild's boat.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

JONATHAN WILD MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE WHICH THOROUGHLY Baffles AND BEWILDERS HIM.

A DEMONIAIC roar came from Wild's lips when he first perceived this circumstance, but its note quickly changed to dread, for in this there was something so extraordinary that he could not control his apprehensions.

"Shall I fire now, Mr. Wild?" said one of the janizaries; "he is close to us, and evidently mad, and there is no knowing what mad people may not do."

"Yes; fire in the devil's name! Why did you not do so before? Fire!"

No sooner was the command given than it was obeyed—for the janizary had a very wholesome fear of mad people, and was only too glad to have the chance of putting an end to that feeling and his trouble at the same time.

The aim was a good one, for a loud shriek resounded over the water, and the swimmer turned round several times, as though in the agonies of death.

"Now row," said Wild. "We have him at last!"
"Quick! or he will sink, and we shall lose him that way, and I should not feel safe unless I saw his dead body with my own eyes."

"There is a couple of boat-hooks lying at the bottom of the boat," said the waterman. "Take them, and you will be able to lay hold of him."

The janizaries stooped down and picked up two of those long poles, with strong iron hooks and spikes at their extremity, and used by the boatmen for various purposes.

One was much longer than the other, and this was the one that was handed to Jonathan Wild.

From its extreme length it was very heavy to hold, and few men could have used it without a great deal of trouble; but Wild was gifted with more than ordinary strength, especially when his mind was fixed upon any particular object: and so on this occasion he took hold of the ponderous implement and wielded it with an ease and dexterity which instantly elicited the waterman's admiration; who, nevertheless, did not relax in his efforts to increase the speed of the boat.

Quickly they reached the spot where the swimmer was still floundering and endeavouring with all his remaining strength to do battle with the waves.

A deep red tinge was on the water around him, which showed that he was bleeding profusely from some wound or wounds.

At last he came within reach.

Jonathan Wild poised the ponderous boat-hook, and watched his opportunity.

Then he, with great viciousness, stuck the sharp steel into the bleeding form.

A deep and horrible groan followed.

The hook had taken a firm hold, and gradually and gently, so that it should not slip; he drew the wooden pole through his hands.

The body followed easily, for it is well known how light a human being is when immersed in water.

Then the janizaries, who had the other hook, fastened it in the clothing, and they hauled steadily, gently assisting their ferocious master.

The boatman, right glad of the chance, rested on his oars, for the exertions he had made had greatly fatigued him.

Another moment, during which the waterman looked on at the proceedings of the three men with horror and a sickened heart.

The body was brought to the boat side.

Then they had by far the most difficult portion of their task to accomplish.

That was to lift the poor mangled body of their prey over the gunwale.

But after a little trouble they managed to do this.

The body had come with the back turned towards them.

As, however, they lifted it and it rolled into the boat, they saw the countenance.

Bleeding, bruised, and disfigured it was, but still there was sufficient configuration left to make them confident that it was not he whom they sought—he who had leaped in so daring a manner off the bridge—he whom they had chased with so much toil and trouble down the Thames.

In fine, it was not Blueskin.

That was a point that admitted not of the least doubt or contradiction.

Indeed, when they came to look more closely at the form which was now lying at full length on its back in the boat, the two men were at a loss to conceive how it was they had not discovered their mistake earlier.

But the fact is, they never gave the subject the least thought at all. It never entered their minds for a single instant that there might be some other person in the river besides Blueskin.

We have, however, not said a word of the effect which this discovery had upon Jonathan Wild.

We feel our powers of depiction totally inadequate to such a task.

Let it suffice to say that he poured forth a volume of the most horrible curses that could be conceived, and which only did him credit on the score of the copiousness of his vocabulary.

His men, accustomed as they were to the fearful imprecations he at times uttered, fairly shuddered as they heard him; and as for the waterman, he sat speechless and agast.

This tempest of passion, from its very violence, soon exhausted itself.

Wild grew calmer.

He looked down at the prostrate body at his feet, and could hardly believe what his own eyes avouched.

How was it the mistake had been made, for a mistake there was somewhere?

But where?

When had it occurred?

He was thoroughly foiled, and the more he thought the more did his perplexities increase.

He was baffled and bewildered.

Had he not, with all speed possible, after Blueskin took his mad leap from the parapet of the bridge, hastened to the landing steps?

Had he not dashed down them just in time to see the head of his lieutenant rise above the water near one of the buttresses of the bridge?

Had he not instantly fired at the object, and received tolerable evidence that his shot had been effective?

Had he not hastened to the precise spot where he saw the head disappear beneath the water, and had he not waited there until, in the distance, he had seen it rise again?

Had he not fixed his eyes most steadfastly upon it, never allowing them to be removed for an instant, while the waterman rowed with all speed possible?

Yes, he had done all this.

How, then, can the mistake have originated?

It was Blueskin who had jumped off the bridge.

That he would have sworn, for he had heard the familiar accents of his voice.

Was it not Blueskin he had seen rise from the water?

That he could almost have sworn to as well, but yet there was a slight possible, though not probable, doubt.

That doubt, however, he found upon further thought to be too slight a one to entertain.

Then, as they chased the swimmer down the Thames, had he ever removed his eyes from him?

No.

They had been fixed during the whole of the time.

But stop.

Although he had not removed his eyes, yet the swimmer was for a little while out of his sight.

Was it then that the mysterious and incomprehensible change had been made?

He could scarcely think so, or imagine how it had been done.

Yet that was the only thing at all reasonable that he could think of to account for it.

And with that means he was very far indeed from being satisfied.

Yet he recollected how the course of the swimmer had been changed after he was a moment out of his sight.

This looked very strange.

It seemed to point to that being the time when the substitution was made.

These thoughts passed through Jonathan's brain with that rapidity of which thought only is capable.

"Throw this fool overboard!" roared he, "and do not sit there like idiots! Over with him!"

Some lingering trace of life and consciousness must have remained in the bleeding form, for as soon as the inhuman command was uttered, it gave vent to a feeble groan, as though of remonstrance.

But it was unheeded.

Wild's janizaries were by no means the most tender-hearted of men.

Catching hold of the poor wretch by the head and the heels, they swung him over in a moment.

A faint cry for help!

A heavy splash!

And then all was over. The body, like lead, sank down to the muddy bottom of the river.

"Row across to those boats," cried Wild, alluding to those lying at anchor off the Surrey side. "He is somewhere there, I feel confident. Quick, it is broad daylight now, and he will have great trouble in getting away unperceived."

As he spoke, the waterman again put his little vessel in motion, and as he did so the sun broke forth from the clouds which had until then enshrouded it, and his broad golden rays fell with full force upon the Thames.

The spectacle was one of rare and picturesque beauty, but neither Wild nor the men he had with him were exactly the persons to appreciate it.

The boats the thief-taker had mentioned were soon reached, and a most vigorous search made among them.

Of course, Wild would not have had the time to search every boat at moorings himself, but the alarm quickly communicated itself from one of the closely-packed vessels to the other; and the inmates of each, on their own responsibility, diligently searched the one they occupied with every wish to unkenneled the fugitive, whom Jonathan described as a murderer, and for whose apprehension a reward of fifty pounds would be given.

Stimulated by the prospect of possessing this sum, the search was prosecuted by every one with the greatest vigour; and though no one was found, Jonathan was satisfied that Blueskin was in that locality.

This left him with the disagreeable conviction on his mind that he had got clear off.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

BLACKFRIARS-BRIDGE IS REGAINED BY WILD, WHO IS AGAIN DISAPPOINTED, FOR HIS PRISONER AND THE GUARD HAVE VANISHED.

"WHERE to now, sir?" asked the waterman. "Shall I put you ashore now?"

"Ya—ah!"

"I say, shall I put you ashore?"

One of the janizaries nudged the waterman to be quiet. He was sufficiently quick of apprehension to take the hint.

Wild was thoughtful.

He did not wish to so readily relinquish his search for Blueskin, who, doubtless, was somewhere very close at hand; but, on the other side, he did not relish the idea of Jack Sheppard remaining so long upon Blackfriars-bridge in no better custody than two of his men.

He knew, from experience, what a very slippery customer Jack was, and there was the dread at his heart that he had taken advantage of his long absence to make his escape; for it must be understood that his little trip down the river, and subsequent search among the vessels, had occupied a considerable portion of time.

The morning was now far advanced, and the great bustle in the streets had begun.

And, so much against his inclination as it was, Jonathan determined to retrace his steps, and, if possible, make sure of one of the two prisoners at least.

Nothing so much vexed Wild as to be defeated, no matter in what it was, and on the present occasion he was more put about than usual, for from the moment he had learned that Blueskin had recovered from what he fully believed to be his death-wound, he determined to lose no pains in hunting him to death.

And when he thought his object was all but accomplished—when, if there had been any present to bet upon the affair, the odds would all have been on his side—lo! in a most mysterious and unaccountable manner, his prey eludes his grasp.

"Curse you," he said, as he sat down in the stern-sheets of the boat. "Why, in the devil's name, don't you row me back to Blackfriars?"

Now, had the waterman been as conversant with Jonathan's sweet ways as the two janizaries were, he would have rowed on in silence, and as fast as he was able.

But he was not versed in the thief-taker's little eccentricities of disposition, so, as any one naturally would do under the circumstances, he replied, that he was waiting for his instructions.

"Ya—ah!"

This was the second time the boatman had heard Wild utter this particularly ferocious and wild-animal-like reply, and he hardly knew what to make of it.

Did it mean an affirmative or a negative?

"A thousand curses!" roared Jonathan. "Do you mean to stay here dallying all day? Row me back to Blackfriars-bridge, or I'm d—d if I don't lift you overboard! Row, curse you! Row, and break your back, for aught I care!"

Muttering something in a low tone between his teeth, the waterman plied his oars, intent upon getting rid of his troublesome fare as soon as possible, and praying that he might never have the ill-luck to be hailed by him again.

Crossing his arms moodily over his breast, and looking down at his feet, with an angry scowl upon his features, Jonathan waited impatiently for the journey to be completed.

The tide, however, was now against them, so that, in spite of the desperate exertions of the rower, they made but little headway.

Still they did progress, and the boatman, by going in a diagonal direction, overcame, in a great measure, the resistance of the tide.

At length, to the inexpressible satisfaction of all parties, the landing-place at Blackfriars was reached.

The waterman guided his boat close to the steps, and Jonathan and his two satellites got out.

Wild was hastening away, oblivious of the fact that he had given the man nothing for his time and trouble.

"Waterman, please," he said. "Don't forget the waterman."

The thief-taker turned round.

"How much?" he asked, gruffly.

"Six shillings, Mr. Wild, if you please."

"Then send in your—ha! ha!—account to the—ha! ha!—Secretary of State, and he—ha! ha!—will pay you. Or," Jonathan added, delighting in the look of blank dismay that was depicted upon the man's face, "or you can call at my house in Newgate-street some time when you're passing—ha! ha!—and I will pay you. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Wild's myrmidons, respectfully, as they followed their master up the steps.

The waterman gazed after them until they turned the angle of the bridge.

"The devil take their wit!" he said. "I wish I had known, I'm d—d if I wouldn't have upset the wherry! And serve them right, for I don't suppose they can swim."

Having thus vented his just indignation, he turned away.

But leaving him to put up with his loss in the most philosophic way he could, we will follow Jonathan Wild on to the bridge.

It was tolerably crowded with vehicles and passengers.

With an uneasy feeling at his heart, he strove to look first to the right and then to the left.

But though he scanned attentively every moving object within sight, his eyes rested not upon what they sought.

With scarcely less uneasiness, his men looked up and down the road, trusting that they might see some signs of their companions.

They trembled when they found they were nowhere in sight.

Jonathan's anger would be dreadful.

And when in one of those moods, he always took revenge upon whoever might be nearest to him.

So they felt their hearts turn cold within them, and experienced that uncomfortable sensation produced by intense fright.

But this time they alarmed themselves needlessly, for Jonathan was seized with a new thought.

"Newgate," he said. "Yes, they have taken him to Newgate! Quick, follow me! To Newgate! To Newgate! They would not think it safe to keep him so long in the streets, and so have taken him there. Perhaps it is best, perhaps it is best."

Thus muttering to himself, Jonathan hustled along the pavement leading over the bridge.

But this mode of progression was too slow for his impatience.

The people on the footpath hindered him, although they made way for him with the utmost rapidity.

He looked behind him, and saw an empty hackney-coach approaching him.

"Hold!" he cried. "Drive me to Newgate!"

This was to the driver, who brought his horses to a standstill.

"Get in!"

This was to his men.

All three then scrambled into the coach as fast as they were able.

"Half-a-guinea!" roared the thief-taker, projecting his ugly head out of the window, "half-a-guinea for your fare if you drive fast. Half-a-guinea, I say!"

As this was only about six times his proper fare, the jarvey cried—

"All right, your honour! I'll have you there in no time. Half-a-guinea! Oh! lor!"

The descent of the bridge was just at that moment reached; and so, by dint of lashing the miserable animals vigorously who were harnessed to the clumsy vehicle, he got them to go at a very creditable rate.

In something less than a quarter of an hour Jonathan reached his destination.

The jarvey had driven up the Old Bailey from the direction of Ludgate-hill, and drew rein opposite to the principal entrance to the prison.

When Wild said Newgate, he meant his own house in Newgate-street; but he did not say anything more, for of course he could not tell whether his men had taken their prisoner to one place or the other.

So he alighted, and, having given the man his fare, knocked, as he alone had the audacity to knock, at the portals of the great city prison.

The summons was instantly responded to.

Followed by his men, Jonathan strode into the vestibule.

There were only two men present. One had charge of the door, and the other was seated on a rude kind of bench, placed there principally for their accommodation.

This man rose, and advanced in a deferential manner towards him.

"Shall I call the governor? Mr. Wild."

"Ya—ah!"

"Yes, sir. In one moment."
 "No!" roared Wild. "I don't want him. How long have you been on duty here?"
 "Four hours, Mr. Wild."
 "Have my men brought in a prisoner during that time—a young chap, slightly made?"
 "Jack Sheppard?"
 "Curse you! What is it to you who it is! I asked you if any one had been brought in."
 "No, Mr. Wild. I humbly begs your pardon, I am sure. But there's no one been brought in while I've been on duty, except an old man for an assault."
 "You are quite sure of that, eh?"
 "Quite, Mr. Wild, and Bill here will corroborate what I say, because he's been on duty too."
 "No, Mr. Wild," said the janitor, "there's only been an old man brought in this morning."
 "It's Little Newgate, then," muttered Jonathan, as he moved off.

The two turnkeys made some hideous grimaces behind his back, which, fortunately, the thief-taker did not perceive.

A bare two minutes sufficed to take him to the door of his own domicile.

He entered.

He repeated the question, this time with a certainty that it would be replied to in the affirmative.

But, to his horror, Tonks, who was on the lock, communicated the startling intelligence that neither Jack nor the two men with whom he had been left in charge had been seen anything of.

CHAPTER CXXX

JACK SHEPPARD ENTERS INTO A VERY INTERESTING CONVERSATION WITH JONATHAN'S MEN.

THE current of events, though it has more than once carried us very near Jack Sheppard, yet has drifted us by him, and thus disenabled us from devoting our attention to him, as we should have wished, long ago.

Our readers, we feel sure, must be deeply anxious to know what befel him after he was left by Jonathan Wild upon the old bridge at Blackfriars.

Two of that worthy's janizaries had taken firm hold of him, and had received the strictest injunctions to keep guard over him.

The moment, however, that the thief-taker disappeared round the angle of the bridge, all three, prisoner and captors, animated by one impulse, rushed to one of the recesses in the parapet which happened to be nearest to them.

Mounting upon the stone seat, they bent over as far as they could without losing their equilibrium, and endeavoured to pierce the thick white mist, and obtain a glimpse of the river below.

We have already described the dispersion of the mist immediately after Wild's arrival at the foot of the steps, and then they saw him draw a pistol, take a hasty aim, and pull the trigger.

In their situation the report of the weapon was something tremendous.

The smoke, too, ascended, and for a moment hid the scene below from their gaze.

But they heard the loud cry of pain which followed the report, and Wild's triumphant assertion that he had hit the mark.

By the time he had uttered it the smoke had cleared away.

Jack's state of mind can be imagined.

Fain would he have leaped over the parapet into the river himself, but the two men who held him in their grasp were on the alert to prevent any such intention being carried out.

Jack made up his mind that this time his friend and companion was no more, and the conviction forced itself upon his notice that he had lost him at the time when he stood most in need of his counsel and assistance.

Then there was the altercation with the boatman, and, in fine, they witnessed the whole of those occurrences which happened round about the old bridge, and with the details of which the reader has already been made acquainted.

They watched the boat as far down the river as it was visible, and when it faded from their sight, the two men looked rather anxiously and curiously at each other to know what they had better do.

Should they obey Wild's commands literally, and remain where they were until he returned, or should they take their prisoner direct to Newgate-street?

Jack was not long in discovering that they had something on their minds.

What that something was he knew not, but he trusted to his own acuteness to find it out, and turn the knowledge to his own advantage.

He could not help observing, though, that, in spite of their indecision about something, they took good care to keep a tight clutch upon him.

It should be premised that these two men had a very great idea of Jack's prowess.

Hitherto Jonathan had failed in all that he attempted against him.

A thing unparalleled.

It should as well be borne in mind that there was nothing these men admired so much as true courage, and Jack they had frequently seen exhibit it under such circumstances as would have made the boldest hearted quail.

But Jack had never done so, and had never failed in coming off victorious.

"Matthew!" said one of Jack's captors, at length.

"Yes."

"You know Johnny's instructions?"

"In course," growled Matthew. "Don't you?"

"Don't you be a fool, Mat. You have conned the matter over, I can tell, as well as I have. Now what do you think we had better do?"

"What do you think?"

"I asked you."

"Then I think the same as you."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Then we are off to Little Newgate?"

"Just so. We can't do wrong, and its a thousand chances if Johnny comes back here first. We'll chance it."

"Agreed."

"But you do not ask me," said Jack, with an assumption of good humour, as he saw they were about to move off, "but you don't ask me for my opinion!"

"Ha! ha!" said Mat, "that's good."

"Oh! very," said the other.

"I'm glad you think so," said Jack, forcing a laugh.

"Oh! get out. What do you think we care for your opinion?"

"A great deal."

"Not a bit of it. Now, Jack, look here."

"I am looking."

"Just understand that me and Mat don't intend to stand no larks. Do we, Mat?"

"Certainly not, Bill, and so I advises him not to try none on!"

"Oh! thank you for nothing!" replied Jack. "Just wait till I begin."

"We gives you warning beforehand, that's all, and if you don't like to take it, why the fault's not ours."

"That's right; but just listen to me."

"No—no."

"Then that's not fair. I have let you have your say, and so you ought to let me have mine."

"We would, Jack, only we know you of old."

"It's all the same to me," replied their prisoner, "but you would find it much to your own benefit to hearken to what I was going to say."

"Are you sure of that, Jack?" asked Matthew.

"Quite," said Jack. "Now, look here. In the first place, you won't be doing wrong by stopping here, because I heard Jonathan give you orders to do so."

"That's true, to begin with."

"Of course it is, and so all I am going to tell you will be true."

"Go on, then. If you're long-winded I shant listen!"

"I want to say a great deal, and you needn't listen without you like."

"Oh! go on, Jack," growled Bill, "you'll waste all the blessed time disputing afore you begin."

"Then let us sit down on this stone seat," said Sheppard, "and wait for Wild's return, and while we are sitting and waiting, what's to hinder us from having a little comfortable talk?"

"Nothink at all."

"Sit down, then."

Accordingly all three repaired to one of those recesses in the bridge, which we have before mentioned, and here they sat down, Jack Sheppard occupying the centre position, with Bill on his right hand and Mat on his left.

It was only fear of their master, the thief-taker, that made them keep such a tight grasp upon him as they did. In their hearts they both admired and liked him, and would have been glad to give him a chance of escape, if it could have been done with safety to themselves.

Jack cleared his throat.

He had no idea what he was going to say to his jailers, and he had no time left him for consideration.

"Of course," he began, "you understand that Blueskin and Jonathan Wild are deadly enemies, and that they will never again hold the same relative positions as they once did."

"It strikes me very forcibly," said Mat, "that Mr. Wild will put an end to his enmity before he comes back, for he has sworn to take his life at the first opportunity, and you know when Jonathan Wild says a thing he always does it."

"Pho—pho! Don't you mind him. Now, I don't mind letting you into a secret."

"What is it?"

"That leap into the Thames was all planned before hand."

"The deuce it was!"

"Yes, and what is more, Blueskin is sure to get off."

"Is that a part of the plan, too?"

"It is."

"Oh!"

"But I don't see"—

"And I shant tell you any more to help you, but you can take my word for this, he will get off."

"You are not joking, Jack?"

"No."

"Then Mr. Wild will be a few savage."

"Most likely."

"Then I'll tell you what, Master Jack."

"Tell it, then."

"You're very clever, but if Blueskin gets off, I'll take jolly good care you don't, there now."

"You are quite at liberty. I don't want anything of the sort."

"I suppose not."

"You wouldn't be off, if you had the chance?"

"Don't be a fool, Mat. What's the good of going on in this ridiculous way when time is precious, and we have some very important business to discuss?"

"Oh! go on."

"Well, I will go on, if you'll only let me. That's just what I've been wanting to do all along."

"Begin, then."

"Do you understand about Blueskin?"

"Yes."

"That's all right, and will prepare you for what I am going to say next. You quite understand that Blueskin will escape from Wild in the river, let him do what he will, because you see, he has a plan that will do it."

"But you told us all that before."

This was very true.

But Jack's invention was not fertile enough to enable him to concoct a plausible story on so short a notice, and so, as the reader has seen, he strove all he could to delay commencing.

All of a sudden, however, and just as the patience of the two men was quite exhausted, an idea sprang into Jack's mind.

It matured itself instantly.

Not only would it, if successful, answer his first purpose, but also prove of much future benefit to him.

What it was will be very quickly seen, for he proceeded to unfold it to Mat and Bill, as they respectively called themselves, without delay.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

A VERY STARTLING PROPOSITION IS MADE BY JACK SHEPPARD TO MATTHEW FLOOD AND BILL BLEWITT.

"You must have noticed," began Jack, "that, now I have come to the point, I hardly know how to express myself; but I have resolved not to let anything of that sort stand in the way, but speak out at once."

"By far the best plan."

"I am glad you think so, because I want more particularly to talk about Jonathan Wild."

"I suppose so."

"And yourselves, too."

"What?"

"I mean with respect to your positions under him."

"Oh!"

"What sort of a master do you find him?"

"Very middling as to that."

"Very bad, you mean," said Jack.

"Well, very bad."

"I can see that. It's a mystery to me how you put up with his brutality."

"We are obliged."

"Not a bit of it!"

"But I say we are!"

"How so?"

"Why, he can tuck any of us up at Tyburn any session he pleases, and so we are compelled to bear his bad temper as well as we can."

"A fig for Tyburn!"

"Indeed! You don't know what it is!"

"I do! It don't frighten me in the least!"

"I believe that, Jack! Ah! I wish I had got your pluck!"

"Pho—pho! It's nothing! But I have got a proposal to make to you."

"Make it, then!"

"Don't be startled!"

"Let us hear it!"

"What do you say to leaving Jonathan's service?"

"Leaving Jonathan's service?"

"Yes!"

"Can't be done!"

"Pho—pho!"

"You must be mad to think of such a thing!"

"It's you that's mad! Jonathan is only a man, though you would fain make him something more. But take my advice. Defy him!"

"Defy him!"

"Yes, and then his power is at an end. It ceases from that very moment! Don't you think so?"

"No!"

"Look at myself! I defied him!"

"I know that."

"And who has got the best of it?"

"You."

"Of course!"

"But you are one of a thousand!"

"If you choose to think so, I am. But you try it, and you will find yourselves the same."

"I doubt it!"

"But you haven't quite heard what I was going to propose. You understand, of course, that Blueskin and myself are united to make common cause against Jonathan Wild!"

"I know."

"Hitherto we have come off first-rate, when you take all things into consideration, have we not?"

"You certainly have."

"Then, just look here, if us two can do what we have, by ourselves, mind you, what do you think we could do if there were four of us?"

"Four of you?"

"Yes, four. Double the number. What do you think we could do?"

"I don't know."

"Why, it's plain enough. We should do twice as much, and then, where would Jonathan be then?"

This was rather an unanswerable question, so the two men remained silent.

"He would be nowhere," continued Jack, triumphantly.

"Nowhere. He wouldn't dare to show his face to us."

"What are you driving at, Jack?"

"Can't you see?"

"Not exactly, and you had better go on explaining."

"I will do so, because you have so far listened to me; and so I feel emboldened to make the proposition in plain words."

"Ay, that's the way to do it. We shall understand you then."

"Very good. Then, Matthew and William—what's your other names?"

"It don't matter."

"It will be best to tell them."

"Mine, then, is Matthew Flood."

"Yes."

"And mine William Blewitt."

"I know your name well."

"Do you?"

"Yes; and you, Matthew, if I recollect right, have got a bit of a grudge against Jonathan?"

"You may say that."

"But you would be nearer the mark," interrupted Blewitt, "if you said Jonathan had got a bit of a grudge against him."

"Oh! that's it."

"Rather different you see."

"Oh! very different; and being different, is so much the better."

"How do you make that out?"

"In this way. In plain words my proposal amounts to this: Blueskin and myself set up against Jonathan Wild. Will you join us?"

"Join you?"

"Yes; be on our side. If you make up your minds to do so, take my word for this, you will have all the advantages you at present enjoy, without any of the disagreeables."

"It is a serious matter."

"I know that; but you don't seem to see that if you do as I wish you cannot, by any possibility, make your position worse, while you have all the chance of making it better."

"There's something in that."

"Everything. Jonathan Wild will never be what he has been. He has reached the top of the hill, and now he will begin to go down, and, mark my words, if he don't descend a great deal quicker than he went up."

"But how do you know that he has reached the top?"

"I will tell you. Jonathan Wild would never have been what he has, and is, had it not been for Blueskin."

"Blueskin?"

"Yes; and now he has set up against him, down he will go. Did you ever notice that while Blueskin was with him all went well?"

"No, I never noticed it; but now you come to speak of it, it certainly did."

"And how have things gone since they parted?"

"Better."

"Better?"

"Yes, better."

"But how?"

"In all ways."

"You are making a great mistake, my friend. He may have made a few lucky strokes, but they ought, instead of inspiring you with confidence, to fill you with doubt."

The two men were staggered by the cool, deliberate way in which Jack spoke.

They hesitated.

There was nothing but the fear of their lives to tempt them to remain in the service of the thief-taker.

And as Jack had very truly said, they could not make their position any worse than it was, while they might make it better.

They would have consented at once, but the great awe and dread of their master in which they stood, made them hold back.

Jack saw that they were wavering in the balance, and that a very little thing indeed would turn the scale.

His liberty, and probably his life, depended upon their decision; so, as may be expected, he looked for it rather anxiously.

He was impatient, too, though he did not deem it politic to show it. He every moment expected to see Jonathan

make his appearance, and then all his hopes would be dashed to the ground.

From where they sat on the stone bench in the recess, they were able, by turning their heads a little, to see down the river as far as London bridge, although that structure, owing to its distance, was only dimly discernible.

He could see nothing of Wild's boat returning as yet, but then it was as likely as not he was returning by land.

So he determined to press his suit yet closer.

"Have you considered?" he asked. "Don't answer hastily, and without you have made up your minds to abide by your decision. I have plans under hand, which, in conjunction, must prove to be profitable. We are in want of two to join us, and you have had the first offer; if you don't like to accept it, we can look out for some one else!"

"But you seem to forget."

"That I am your prisoner. No, I don't. That gives me no uneasiness at all; for if Jonathan was to load me with chains, and put me in the deepest and strongest cell in Newgate, it would not hold me; I should be sure to get out."

The easy, off-hand assurance with which these words were uttered is perfectly indescribable.

But it had a great effect upon the two men.

"There is only one thing, Jack," they said, after a little pause, "that we want to assure ourselves of."

"And what is that?"

"Why, that all you have been telling and representing to us is quite right; because, if it is"—

"What!"

"I don't say what! but is it true?"

"Every word of it."

"I believe you, Jack; and so I for one say, I'm with you; and I know Blewitt will say the same."

"I do just the same. If what you say is right, we are with you."

"Depend upon it, and let me assure you that, with Blueskin as our leader, we shall be able to set Jonathan at defiance. Our policy will be this—not to interfere with him without he interferes with us."

"That's only fair!"

"It is reasonable; and if the villain seeks an encounter with us, his overthrow is certain. Are you with us?"

"We are; and we should have said so long ago, only we wanted to try you, and see that all was right. We were sick and tired of Wild's service, and were studying how to leave it best. So we are with you!"

They released their hold upon him as they spoke.

"Hurrah!" said Jack, as he felt himself free. "Come on, my friends; and you will find yourselves more than a match for Jonathan Wild!"

"I'll hang him!" said Flood, malignantly. "I have sworn it, and I will keep my oath."

Jonathan had sworn to hang him. We shall see how the oaths were kept.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

EDGORTH BESS DISCOVERS THE SECRET EXIT FROM HER CHAMBER, AND PERFORMS A MOST DESPERATE ACHIEVEMENT.

FRUGAL as the meal was of which Edgworth Bess partook, yet she felt all the better for it.

She was stronger, and not so dejected as she had been.

Consequently she was able to look about her with greater calmness, and reason a little upon the events which had lately happened.

There was much to perplex and baffle her.

Two circumstances particularly did so.

The reader can guess what they were.

One was the mysterious manner in which the clock had struck.

What did it mean?

She had only one answer to the question, and that was that it was a signal of some sort.

But a signal of or for what?

There she was baffled, and unable to proceed.

Then there was the other circumstance.

The mysterious and inexplicable manner in which the colonel had first acted and then disappeared.

But for his behaviour she was not particularly at a loss to account. She had a pretty shrewd idea of what it meant.

He had raised his arm, uttered the ejaculation, and pointed to the window as he did, for the sole purpose of distracting her attention from himself.

He succeeded in his attempt, and he took advantage of the moment that her back was turned.

But why did he slam the door of the bedroom?

That, to her, seemed to indicate that he had passed through it, and had done so in order to hinder her from entering it.

But she had made a most careful and minute examination of the two outer chambers, and she felt sure there was no concealed mode of exit there.

For, as she reasonably enough considered, it must be some easy mode, or he would not have been able to leave the apartment so quickly as he had.

Then she set herself to think of some other motive for his closing the door violently.

Was it done for the purpose of misleading her?

Perhaps so.

The concealed exit might be in that very room—easy of discovery if its existence was suspected. Had he, with calculating forethought, reckoned upon throwing her off the scent?

From what she had already seen of the man—and woman's quickness in reading man's character is proverbial—she thought this must be it, and the more she pondered, the stronger grew the conviction in her mind.

Then, on the heels of the other, followed another thought, which really seemed the most plausible of all.

Assuming that there was the secret exit from the chamber.

That exit would most probably be accomplished by a panel in the wainscot.

That panel would close with a spring.

When it shut there would be a faint snap.

Was it to conceal that faint snap that the colonel had slammed the door?

Was it his motive to make the greater sound drown the less; for if the snap was heard, it would go a long way towards fixing the exact locality of it: the piece of knowledge most requisite to keep from his prisoner.

Then, pursuing the same train of thought, she further asked herself whether it was not from the last two causes combined?

She felt almost sure of it.

Endowed with a sudden and momentary hope, she sprang to her feet.

She listened.

All was still, save the dull, hollow murmur of the waves upon the beach, and the palpitation of her heart, which had increased to a most painful and unbearable extent.

Her agitation was excessive, and as she considered it was without adequate cause, she tried to shake it off, and to a certain extent succeeded.

Having done so, she, in a methodical manner, began the examination of the room.

Carefully she felt over the whole surface of all the panels in the apartment, in the hope of meeting with some slight obstruction.

But in this she was disappointed, although the operation was very carefully performed, and took up a great deal of time.

Then, with her knuckles, she commenced sounding the panels in different places, in order to judge, by the difference in the sound, whether there was a hollow space behind any one of them.

Presently she came to that angle in which the door opening into the bed-chamber was placed.

She knocked.

The sound produced, though not what could exactly be called hollow, was yet very different to that which she had previously elicited.

She knocked again.

Then she tried to shake the panel.

And was successful.

Yes, it was evidently loose in its frame.

And now it should be explained that, as you walked out of the outer room into the bed-chamber, the knob of the door was on the right hand side of it, and that when you turned the handle to open it, you had to pull the door towards you, not push it.

The consequence of this was, then, when the door was wide open, it rested against the paneling, for we have before stated its position to be in the angle of the room.

Then Bess, with an acumen which she could hardly have been supposed to possess, came to the conclusion that the colonel, finding the door open, it of course impeded his retreat, and so he had shut it in the way he had.

The secret panel was now all but discovered. The only chance of their remaining undiscovered is when there is no suspicion of their presence, but the moment that suspicion is formed, if there is one, it is sure to be found out by anyone taking a little trouble, for they can never be perfectly concealed.

That there was the secret entrance Bess felt confident, and now, having found the spot, it only remained for her to discover the means of opening it.

With this end in view she stood upon a chair, and began to feel at the very top of the panel.

Placing the four fingers of the right hand together, and holding them nearly straight, she moved them in a horizontal manner from side to side, thus describing a series of lines, and taking care, as she descended, to leave no space in between them.

In this way she went slowly down the panel.

She reached the centre.

But, up to the moment of her doing so, her pains had been unrewarded.

But she did not despair. Already had she met with greater success than ever she had anticipated.

She got off the chair—for there was no longer any need of it—and renewed her search.

Lower, lower, lower she went, until she at last thought that the means of opening the secret door were too cunningly hidden for her to be able to find them out.

Then she reached the floor.

She could scarcely repress a cry of joy when her fingers encountered some little projection.

She looked down, and felt it more carefully.

It was a small brass stud, fixed in the panel.

Her first impulse was to press upon it, but that produced no effect.

Then she placed her thumb nail against it, and strove to move it first in a lateral, and then in an upward direction.

As she did this, it went gradually up to the extent of perhaps half an inch.

This stud, it should be stated, was fixed in the centre of the bottom of the panel, quite close down on to the floor.

Having done this, she tried to find, by pushing in different directions, which way it opened.

The mode was rather singular.

When pressing upon the stud, now it was raised, she found the woodwork give way before her.

Looking up, she saw that there must be hinges fixed in some way to the top part of the panel, which opened just the reverse way that doors do, or as doors would if their hinges were shifted from the side and fixed to the top.

She pushed further and further, but met with that kind of resistance which a spring would offer, and if she slackened the pressure in the least, it began to close again of its own accord.

It was so dark on the other side that she could see nothing, and being sure of opening it again without trouble, she allowed it to close.

In her bedroom there was a small lamp, and this she lighted.

Then she felt the necessity of pitching upon some object which would counteract the force of the spring, and enable her to keep the door open while she made her explorations.

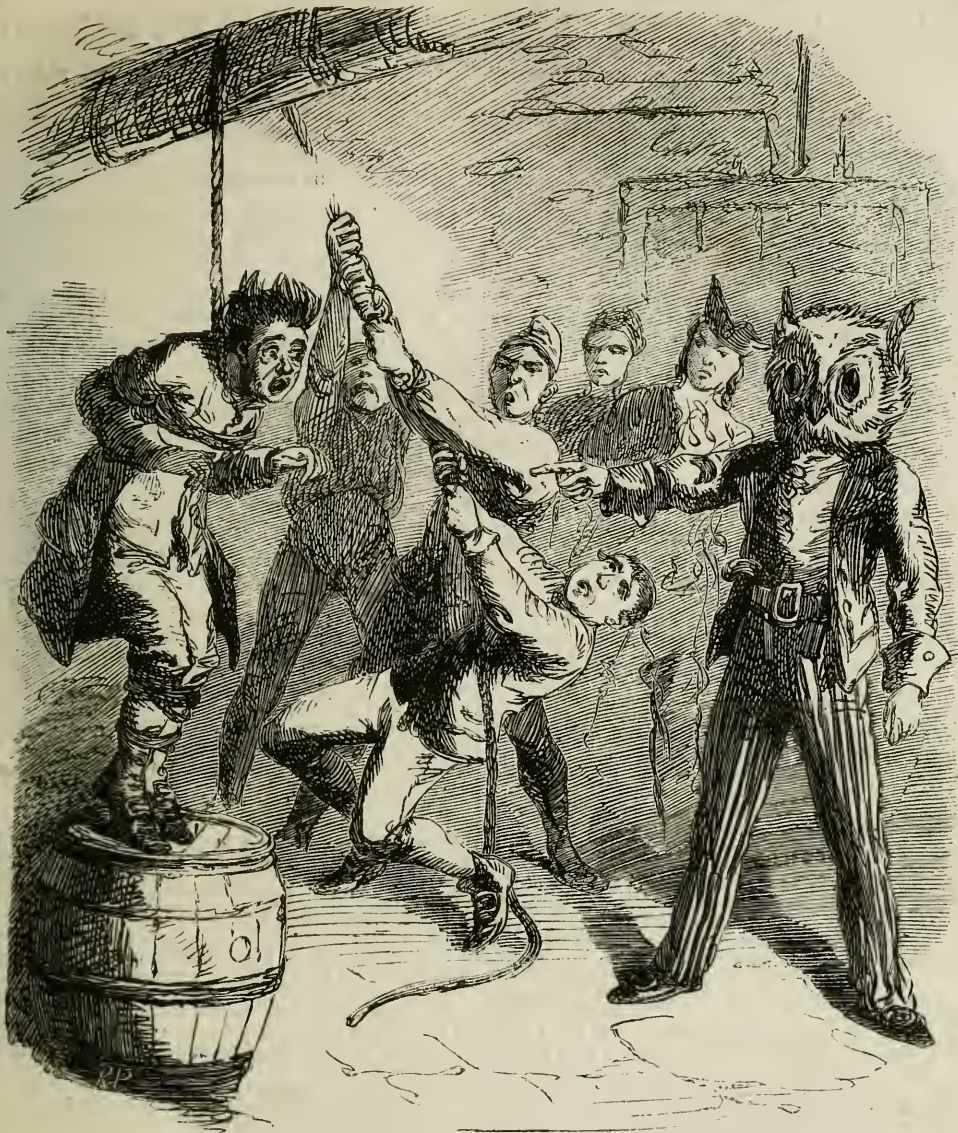
When standing upon the chair she had noticed that the rail at the back was loose.

She resolved to break this off, and after a few attempts succeeded.

She was then armed with a piece of beech-wood, about two feet long and nearly two inches square.

This would answer the purpose she required of it most admirably.

These arrangements having been completed, she took the lamp in her hand, and went to the corner of the room,



[CAPTAIN HOWLET ORDERS THE EXECUTION OF THE SPY.]

first listening that there was no one close at hand to interrupt her.

All was still.

She knelt down, and quickly had the panel undone.

She pressed it as far back as she could, using the piece of wood the back of the chair afforded her for this purpose.

Then, when it had reached its full extent, she carefully lodged it against a projection.

The door was open.

A current of cold air came from the aperture, and more than once its force was so great that the lamp was all but extinguished.

She saved it, however, by shielding it with her hand.

Then holding it forward, and lying almost on her face, she proceeded to look what kind of place it was the secret door in the paneling disclosed.

She uttered an ejaculation of terror!

The light of the lamp revealed nothing but the sides of an abyss, the bare sight of which, and thoughts of the

frightful depth, sent a chill of horror through her blood.

Had she been less careful, what an awful fate would have been hers.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

EDGORTH BESS MAKES GOOD USE OF THE SECRET OUTLET TO HER CHAMBER, BUT THE END OF HER PERILS IS NOT YET REACHED.

THERE was nothing whatever to indicate the position of such a pitfall, and nothing to guard one from falling into it; and no doubt this was a part of the cleverness of the original contriver, who, in anticipation of some person discovering the secret outlet, determined that they should not long survive that knowledge.

Caution—generally, in its extended phase, timidity—is a prominent characteristic in the mental composition of nearly all females; and thus it was Edgorth Bess, dif-

fering in no wise from others of her sex, acted in the manner we have described.

Not for one moment had she expected to make such a discovery as she had; and coming upon her so unawares as it did, she was obliged to draw back and wait a moment while she recovered herself.

The peril she had so narrowly escaped unnerved her, and made her less capable of carrying out her enterprise successfully than she otherwise would have been.

Nor was what she saw around her at all calculated to reassure her. On the contrary, the gloomy room, with its walls of dark wainscot, now momentarily illuminated by the flickering light, and then left in the deepest shadow, was well calculated to excite superstitious ideas.

All was very—very still—dreadfully still. It would have been a relief of no mean character if she could have heard some sound to indicate that there were others in the world besides herself, but no sound met her ears.

Even the roaring of the sea had ceased, or at all events, had become so nearly so, that from her situation she could hear nothing of it.

Rapidly and painfully did her heart pulsate, and she drew her breath, not in long, healthy aspirations, but in short, quick, uncertain gasps, that sounded more like sighs than ought else.

Her hand trembled, and the light of the lamp—feeble at the best—was much diminished in brightness, as the motion of her hand was communicated to it.

It peopled the walls, too, with strange, horrible, moving shadows.

But, despite the state of alarm and vague apprehension in which the poor girl found herself to be, the idea of how necessary it was for her to calm herself in order to attempt her escape never lost its prominence in her imagination.

At last, with a vigorous effort of the will, she rose to her feet, and, still retaining the little lamp in her grasp, made an inspection of every part of the chamber.

This dispersed much of the supernatural dread of she knew not what, which she had experienced, and then she returned to the strange opening in the wall.

Her contrivance, simple as it was, for overcoming the propensity of the spring, answered admirably.

Timorously, notwithstanding her determination to be firm, she knelt down again upon the floor, and, resting the weight of her body upon her left arm, she leaned over the abyss.

But the lamp was totally inadequate to the task of dissipating the darkness with which the pit was filled, and so far from aiding her, it had an opposite effect.

Unwilling to leave the place until she had thoroughly examined it, for something within her which might, with questionable propriety, be called inspiration, seemed to tell her that, however repulsive it might look, yet it led to freedom.

Therefore she again laid herself down at full length, with her head and the upper portion of her body actually hanging over the abyss.

But she steadied herself with her left hand, with which she clutched the sides of the wainscot tightly.

Her right arm she held quite down the pit-like place, with the tiny light in her hand.

This she waved about in the endeavour to catch a glimpse of the sides, but, to her bewilderment, there were no traces of sides visible—all was void, empty space; nor had she any apparent means by which she could discover either the depth or the width.

"But surely," she thought, "there must be something like a wall at the side nearest to me. I will try."

As she spoke, she moved her hand in the direction she had mentioned, fully expecting that it would be as she had said, but in this she was again deceived, for her hand encountered no opposition whatever.

There could be nothing delusive about it, for when she so held her hand, the light was quite out of sight.

Such a thing as this was calculated in every way to increase her fears and give tangibility to those dim presages of horror which she had had so much difficulty to banish from her mind.

What kind of place it could be which the secret panel disclosed she could form no notion. Conjecture she found to be quite useless.

But suddenly, as she still moved her hand, in an anxious and vain attempt to see about her, something came in contact with her hand.

Although this was just what she expected, or rather was hoping to find, she uttered a cry of dismay, which she found it impossible to repress.

But this was caused by the singular feel which the object had her hand had casually touched.

It was soft, yet hard.

Yielding to the touch, yet firm.

What could it be?

The question was one to which she was incompetent to frame a reply.

Gathering courage from desperation, for she felt certain, if she dallied much longer, the opportunity of achieving her freedom would be lost, she bent her head lower, in order to look what it was.

For a moment she saw nothing, and then she perceived the mysterious object which she had touched.

Her fears were dispelled in an instant, and she grew quite angry with herself to think that she had been weak enough to entertain them.

The mysterious object was a rope.

Yes, a rope, and nothing more.

But it was of extraordinary thickness, and knotted in many places.

Straight down it hung, the end seeming to lose itself in the very bowels of the earth.

It was attached, in some way which she could not very well make out, to the flooring beneath her.

The use of this rope seemed obvious.

It was by its aid that the secret panel was made of service.

But where did it lead?

With what place did it communicate?

Was the length of the rope, apparently endless in the imagination, comparatively short in the reality?

Who could tell?

The only means by which she could acquire such knowledge was to descend by it.

She shuddered at the idea.

Was she strong enough to support the weight of her body for any length of time by clinging to a rope?

She feared not.

Already was she a prey to exhaustion.

But then the remembrance of the terrible scene she had had with Colonel Thorne flashed across her mind, and that seemed to endow her with ten times her ordinary strength.

No longer did she hesitate.

Let the rope lead to what place it might—let there be what dangers there might—she would dare all—brave all—anything would be better than remaining where she was, exposed to such peril as she had been.

Dominated by these thoughts, she placed the light upon the ground, and then felt for the rope.

Its position was apparently awkward, but it was not so in reality, and she found herself able, by lowering her body gently, to take hold of it easily.

She clung to it for dear life.

The rope swayed from side to side with her weight at first, but it soon steadied itself.

She looked upwards to the ceiling of the chamber, which she fondly hoped and believed she was about to leave for ever.

Downwards she dare not trust herself to glance; and, besides that, she knew that it would be impossible to see a foot below her.

Had she been able she would have taken the little lamp with her, but she knew she would require the full use of her hands, and she could not see how else she was to carry it.

Reluctantly, therefore, she left it behind her upon the floor of the room, for she could not but be conscious of the amount of consolation it would be to her upon her perilous journey.

Discarding, however, from her mind all these vain regrets, she began to lower herself down the rope.

She found, after a little while, that it was specially adapted to the purpose to which she was putting it.

It was just thick enough to grasp comfortably, while, at about every ten inches, there was a large knot, which afforded a hand as well as a foot-hold.

Cautiously—very cautiously, and not moving one hand or one foot until she was certain the other was secure, the intrepid girl lowered herself down the rope.

No other courage than that of desperation could have prompted her to the execution of such a feat.

Down, down—ceaselessly down she went.

The little light to which she looked up had now dwindled down until it was no larger than a star.

Still there seemed no end to the rope.

Surrounded as she was by utter darkness, she could form no idea of the place she was in except that she could not divest herself of the idea that it was well-like in shape.

There can be no doubt that Edgworth Bess would never have attempted to descend by the rope had she not had the conviction firmly implanted in her mind that it was by means of it Colonel Thorne had left her presence.

It might lead her into his arms, but she trusted that good fortune would so far befriend her as to shield her from him.

At length, after an apparently endless time, her feet touched something firm, which she quickly enough found to be solid earth.

Still was she in utter darkness, and so, without venturing to move, she held to the rope which she had already begun to look upon as a friend.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

CAPTAIN HOWLET COMMANDS THE EXECUTION OF THE SPY.

WHAT kind of place it was which Edgworth Bess had managed with so much difficulty to reach, and what befel her upon her arrival there, must be deferred to another chapter, as the reader's attention must first be given to that strange scene in the caverns underneath Colonel Thorne's residence, "The Larches."

It will be recollected that the pirate-band had, with some apparent show of reason, pronounced one of their companions guilty of treachery and being a spy, after which, without in the least regarding his denial of the charge, and protestations of his innocence, they had proceeded to execute very summary justice upon him indeed, by pinioning his arms, placing him upon an inverted barrel, and tying a noose round his neck.

His death—immediate death—seemed inevitable, but at this crisis the lieutenant, or second in command to the captain, had made his appearance.

This person, whom the prisoner had addressed by the name of Morgan, desiring to be placed in possession of the facts of the case, had been shown a letter alleged to have been dropped by the prisoner.

This letter was read, and its character was such as left no reasonable doubt of the truth of the accusation behind; but Morgan, deeming the matter important enough to be brought before their much-dreaded captain, had by some means or other, known only to himself, gone to the side of the cave and summoned him.

Then, as we have described, there was a brief interval of silence, which would have been quite perfect had it not been for the miserable being whose position was truly so awful a one.

But after the lapse of a few minutes, there advanced from the darkest portion of the cavern a tall and commanding figure, which, when it reached the light, presented an appearance most dreadful to behold.

It was a man of gigantic stature, but instead of the head of a human being, he had the head of a large white owl. The appearance of it was grotesquely hideous.

To the wild, lawless spirits, however, who were there assembled, it must have been familiar, for with one accord they cried—

"The Howlet! the Howlet! Three cheers, mates, for our brave captain, the Howlet! Down with the spy! Slay him! Kill the traitor to our captain! Three cheers for Captain Howlet!"

These, and many other similar vociferations, greeted him.

How long they would have continued is highly problematical.

As it was, they received a sudden check.

The captain, as he had been called, slowly elevated his right hand.

The action was noted.

A dead silence ensued.

The effect was like magic.

Morgan approached, and, with a deferential air, addressed himself to the strange being, Captain Howlet.

The reader must already be aware who and what this individual is—at all events he has been shown in both characters, and so it will be folly to attempt to keep up any mystery concerning him.

In order, however, that there be no mistake—no misunderstanding, we may as well in this place briefly say that the information contained in the spy's letter was perfectly correct. Colonel Thorne, the envied wealthy gentleman, and the everywhere dreaded Captain Howlet were one and the same person.

It does not need any great effort on the part of the mental faculties to imagine how it would be tolerably easy to maintain two such characters in such a manner as to avert all suspicion.

The device of the owl's head, which was merely a curiously-fashioned head-dress, was for the purpose of surrounding the pirate-chief with more attributes of the wild and wonderful than had been imputed to him.

It certainly gave him a most horrible and unnatural appearance, and, to any one who had not seen or heard of it, would be productive of the utmost terror.

As we have hinted in another place, the pirate crew were armed with head-dresses of a similar kind, but these they generally laid aside when in the security of their cave, and resumed them only when on board.

But Captain Howlet was very rarely indeed seen among his men without this appendage, and on this occasion, when their was no actual reason for so doing, he had assumed it.

One thing only remains unexplained, and that is the precise means by which Lieutenant Morgan had summoned him.

They were very simple.

Attached to the bell upon which the hours were struck by the clock within the belfry above "The Larches" was a hammer, the handle of which was attached to a piece of wire, that, passing down the strange, well-like place, which Edgworth Bess had with so much peril descended, terminated in a large wooden handle in the recess, into which we stated he made his way.

The nine strokes signified that something of a very unusual and important character had occurred, and that his immediate presence was necessary.

With the fear, then, at his heart that he was menaced by a danger of a more than ordinary magnitude, Colonel Thorne had hastily left the apartment in which he had immured Edgworth Bess.

He had adopted the expedient of pointing through the window in order to distract her attention from himself, and succeeded in his object.

Then, taking instant advantage of the opportunity afforded him, he had slammed the inner door, passed through the secret panel, and, by means of the rope, reached the caverns below.

Ere he entered upon the turbulent and awful scene he paused a moment, and taking his owl's head-dress from a kind of shelf upon which he was accustomed to keep it, he had donned it.

Amid the silence, then, that succeeded his holding up his hand, Morgan spoke—

"There is treachery here, captain," he said. "Black and dangerous treachery!"

Captain Howlet made a movement with his hand, which signified "proceed," and that was the sole reply he chose to give.

But he did not need to be told who was the suspected man. A glance would serve to show any one that.

He folded his arms, however, and looked steadfastly at him.

The eyes in the owl's head had a truly horrible aspect. They were formed of dark-coloured, yet transparent, glass.

They were large, round, and prominent, like the real eyes of this strange nocturnal bird.

Through these lenses, for such they were, the captain could see with great distinctness.

He never removed them from the man on the barrel.

"The men were going to string him up, captain, and give him a short shrift, but I happened to come, and when I heard the particulars, I thought the matter was important enough to call you."

"Good, Morgan!" said Captain Howlet, in strange

muffled tones, from behind his singular mask. "What kind of treachery is it?"

"You shall hear, captain; but shall I tell you, or call the men forward, and question them before your face?"

"Question them," said the captain. "There can then be no mistake."

"Certainly not. Batson!"

"Yes, your honour."

The man who had before spoken again stood forward, and, folding his arms, awaited his interrogations.

"Is that man on the barrel the one you suspect of treason?"

"He is, your honour."

"His name is Will Ogden, is it not?"

"I don't know for that. Sometimes he calls himself Will Ogden, and sometimes Tom Drotchel, and it appears his name is neither the one nor the other."

"Well, let that pass for the present. We will call him Will Ogden."

"Yes, your honour."

"What was the first suspicious thing you noticed?"

"As he walked across the cave, we saw a paper drop to the ground."

"From his person?"

"I am quite sure of that, your honour."

"What next?"

"As I said before, we thought it was a love-letter, or something of that sort, so I crept quietly after him, and picked it up without his knowing, for we meant to tease him a bit over it."

"Well?"

"I couldn't read the letter, so I gave it to Joe Dudley."

"Now, Dudley, stand forward."

In obedience to this command, the man stood forward who had read the letter, which he did again, but as it has already been placed before the reader, it is scarcely worth while to repeat it.

At last the epistle was finished.

By the manner alone in which he received this communication, it was apparent how much the pirate captain was surprised at it. The secret there mentioned he fancied was unknown to any of his lawless band.

He was furious.

But the desire to know more enabled him to control himself. The traitor he could deprive of life at any moment he thought proper.

"To whom is the letter addressed?" he asked.

Joe Dudley turned it over in his hand.

The thought of looking on the back for the name of the person for whom the letter was intended, had not occurred to him.

It was there, however, and, to the surprise of all present, he read—

"Mr. Jonathan Wild, Newgate-street."

CHAPTER CXXX.

COLONEL THORNE DISCOVERS EDGWORTH BESS, BUT MEETS WITH AN INTERRUPTION TO HIS LEAVING THE CAVERN.

PROBABLY there was no one present in the cave upon whom this announcement took so great an effect as Captain Howlet.

The fame of the great thief-taker, unusual as it was, had failed to penetrate the intricacies of those old Kentish caverns, and to the pirate crew his name was almost, if not quite, unknown.

But it was not so with their captain.

In his character of Colonel Thorne, and during his residence in London, he had both seen and heard of this extraordinary man.

He well knew how much his interference was to be dreaded—he had seen it exemplified in others.

And there was pretty positive evidence before him that he was acquainted with all his secrets.

Tearing off the strange head-dress which he wore, and casting it upon the ground, he cried—

"Give me the letter—I must see it! Give it to me!"

With a trembling hand, Joe Dudley presented the scrap of paper to him.

There could be no doubt whatever about the matter.

As his eyes rested upon it, his face assumed an aspect more terrible than any of his crew had ever beheld upon it.

He drew the long, heavy sword which he carried by his side, and, rushing forward, held it threateningly before the traitor's face.

"Speak!" he cried, hoarsely. "Confess!"

"I do—I do!"

"What?"

"I am innocent."

"Bah!"

"I am innocent! I am innocent, captain! The letter did not fall out of my pocket, or, if it did, it was placed there by some one."

"Beware!" said the Howlet; "I have long had my suspicions of you. You are no sailor, I am certain, though such, when you entered the band, you represented yourself to be. Unless you would quit life by the most lingering torments, confess all!"

"Spare my life, then, captain. Spare my life!"

"I shall make no promise."

"I will tell all—I will tell all!"

"You have acknowledged your guilt. Now speak. It will remain for me to decide afterwards whether your life is to be spared."

"I will, captain."

"Go on, then."

"I—I wrote that letter!"

"You did?"

"Yes, captain; but I didn't send it—I didn't mean to send it."

"Ha! would you trifle with your life? Up with him!"

The men needed no second bidding.

The spy was off his feet in a moment.

He kicked and plunged convulsively, but his struggles were in vain.

He grew black in the face.

In a few moments all was over.

He was a corpse.

A marling-spike was stuck into the ground, and the extremity of the rope tied tightly round it.

Then the dead body was allowed to swing to and fro, as a warning to those who might have contemplated a similar act.

Captain Howlet was satisfied.

"My mates," he said, for, with that policy for which he was so remarkable, he endeavoured to conciliate and be on good terms with his crew, "it is a good thing chance favoured us so far as to let us know that villain's designs. Who knows but that another hour or two might have seen that letter on its way to the person to whom it was addressed, and then, if he had received it, there would have been no quarter for any of us."

A fierce murmur followed his words.

"However, that danger's over now. Here is the letter. It will never be sent now. Look."

As he spoke, Captain Howlet held the paper in the flame of one of the many oil-lamps that were placed around the cavern, and in a moment it was consumed.

"Keep yourselves ready," he said, "for I intend to cruise off again directly. This will hardly be a safe place for us just at present, and it is best to avoid danger of discovery. Cut the traitor down, and bury him somewhere out of sight. I will begone, but only above. Morgan, if anything occurs, signal me directly."

"Ay—ay! captain."

"Keep a sharp look out, and be prepared. Not that I am much afraid, because I think we have been lucky enough to nip the evil in the bud."

Having thus spoken, Captain Howlet crossed the cavern in the direction of the low dark archway through which he had entered it.

As he neared it, however, he fancied he heard a slight sound.

At any other time than the present, he would probably have allowed it to go unheeded.

But the scene we have described had disturbed him greatly.

In the first place, Jonathan Wild had a suspicion at least, if not more, of who and what he was.

The fact that he was known on shore as Colonel Thorne had been published to his men.

Discovery was what he had to dread. For a long time past he had eluded it, and flattered himself that for a long time he should still be successful in doing so.

Every little thing would now be noticed. He would be in a state of perpetual suspense; and so, when he entered

the little recess and heard a faint sound, he started and listened, fancying he was about to encounter an enemy.

The place was profoundly dark.

He hesitated to advance.

"Morgan!" he cried; "Morgan!"

"Ay—ay! your honour."

"A light here! Quick! A light!"

Morgan hastily detached one of the lamps from the wall, and ran towards him.

Captain Howlet took it from him with his left hand. In his right he held his drawn sword.

Thus provided, he advanced.

The lamp shed a clear light around him.

He advanced cautiously.

Ere, however, he had proceeded a dozen paces, he uttered a loud exclamation, and, dropping his sword, he rushed forward.

A scream—loud—shrill—ear-piercing—followed the act.

The reader can guess from whose lips it had come.

It was Edgworth Bess.

When, with so much hazard, she had descended the rope and found her feet touch the earth, she paused, not knowing what to do.

Darkness surrounded her.

Not that darkness which may be seen abroad, or in a chamber, but such a darkness as is found only in the caverns of the earth, where no ray of light ever penetrates.

She knew not what danger might attempt a movement in any direction, and so, bewildered, alarmed, and exhausted, she clutched the rope tightly, determined not to quit her hold until she felt herself in safety.

It was just at this moment that she heard a footstep and a voice.

The latter was known to her.

It was Colonel Thorne's.

She felt as though she was about to faint.

But fortunately she was able to rally herself from it.

More heavily, however, she leant upon the rope, which made a faint rustling sound.

It was this which had reached the colonel's ears as he was about to return.

Edgworth Bess heard him pause.

She heard him call to Morgan for a light.

But so intense was her terror that she found herself unable to move in the least from where she stood, even when she saw the pirate approaching with the light.

With the strength of desperation, however, she held on to the rope.

Then she uttered that awful scream which followed so close upon the captain's exclamation.

As may be imagined, these cries rang with great shrillness through the vaulted chambers, reaching the ears of the pirates, and causing them to hasten to the spot.

Captain Howlet, in a second, had darted forward and caught Bess tightly round the waist.

But still she kept her hold upon the rope, nor could he force her from it.

But Morgan, although as full of surprise at seeing a girl there as any one well could be, yet retained some of his faculties, and so, drawing his sword, he with one blow severed the rope a few inches above the place where Edgworth Bess had grasped it.

Captain Howlet, of course, ceased to experience any difficulty in dragging his captive with him.

He carried her into the outer cavern.

The poor girl's mind and strength almost gave way before the continued attacks which had been made upon it, and she was now in a state of semi-unconsciousness.

She still retained her hold upon the rope.

Captain Howlet placed her on the ground, and, before his men had time to express their astonishment at the affair, so inexplicable as it was to them, he cried—

"Quick! all of you, quick! Morgan, get everything in readiness. We will go aboard at once!"

"All is quite ready," said Morgan in reply. "Follow me, lads, to the outlet!"

So saying, Lieutenant Morgan hastened forward, while the men, in a disorderly throng, followed him across the cave, and down a long tortuous passage.

The captain quickly raised Edgworth Bess from her recumbent posture, and followed in the rear.

The passage was about five hundred paces in length.

Upon reaching its extremity, they paused.

All was in darkness.

But the men were too much accustomed to what they were about to need a light, besides it would have been rather dangerous to have shown one.

They were opening the secret door in the rocks.

But ere they had quite finished their task, there was a strange, grating sound against the rocks, and a voice cried, in loud and startling tones—

"Forward! forward! Fire upon them if they offer the least resistance! Take them, dead or alive! Forward! forward! The ladder is quite forward! Down with them, and then there will be an end to Captain Howlet and his pirate band!"

CHAPTER CXXXI.

JACK SHEPPARD REACHES GILBERT-PASSAGE IN SAFETY, BUT HEARS NO TIDINGS OF BLUESKIN.

JACK SHEPPARD and the two men who had so strangely left Wild's service and entered his, proceeded at a good pace towards Drury-lane.

It was getting daylight, and, like those predatory animals of nocturnal habits, they hastened to find some place where they could conceal themselves during the day.

Impulse, without reflection, caused Jack to take the route he did. A moment's thought would have told him it was dangerous in the extreme, being the first place Wild would go to look for him.

Strange to say, however, so engrossed was he with thinking of Blueskin and poor Edgworth Bess, he reached Wych-street before it occurred to him.

Then happening to look up, he saw a little way before him, on the opposite side of the way, the residence of his old master, John Roots, the carpenter.

The shop-shutters were shut, and the blinds before all the windows drawn down.

In the busy whirl of ideas and incidents to which he had been subject since that night when we first introduced him to the reader, the original purpose of his revenge had almost been lost sight of; but now, when he unexpectedly found himself before his dwelling, thoughts of the past surged up in his breast, and those angry passions which had been for so long dormant, broke forth afresh, with additional fury, from the long rest they had had.

Blewitt and Flood looked astonished, and rather alarmed, too, when they saw the change in Jack's demeanour. They could not tell what to make of it.

"Villain!" said Jack, hoarsely, apostrophizing the senseless wood-work, "this is all your work! but you shall yet live to repent your treatment of the poor apprentice, who you would not believe to be honest, because his father was hanged. Tremble, villain! tremble! I have sworn to be revenged; and if it is ten years to come, I shall remember my oath, and keep it!"

"What's the row, Jack?" asked Matthew Flood.

"Nothing—nothing! No matter. A little private affair. Come on."

"All right. But, I say, Jack!"

"What?"

"Is it some one you don't like?"

"I hate him."

"That is enough. Tell me who he is, and I'll hack his whistle for him."

"No—no! Leave him to my hands. My revenge will be all the sweeter for being long kept."

"But who is he, Jack?"

"My master."

"Your master?"

"Yes; I was bound 'prentice to John Roots, the carpenter."

"That shop over the way?"

"Yes, that is it."

"It says over the door, 'John Roots, Carpenter and Joiner.'"

"Such is his trade, and such was to have been mine. I should then have been within the pale of society, but now I am for ever shut out. By ill-usage, threats, sneers, and false accusations he raised a demon within me, which grew too strong for him at last."

"Eh!"

"My father was hanged," continued Jack, who, whenever he thought upon this theme, was almost frantic. "But what had I to do with that. I was not guilty, or

they would have hanged me too. Would they had done so—would they had done so—for what has life been to me? A curse—a curse!”

Flood and Blewitt looked at each other in silence.

They knew not what to say.

“But a time will come, John Roots, when you will bitterly regret the way in which you acted, and when it is too late, then you will wish you had done otherwise. Beware! beware!”

“Come, Jack,” said Blewitt, as he tapped him on the arm, “Come along, and don’t kick up such a row, or you will have all the blessed people in the street looking out of winder.”

“True—true!” replied Sheppard, recovering himself in a moment. “I had forgotten where I was.”

“I thought so.”

“I will tell you some day,” he continued, “the whole history; but now we must be on the look out for a place where we can hide, for Jonathan will be sure to make sharp search after us.”

“You may say that, Jack,” remarked Flood.

“I don’t feel at all comfortable,” added Blewitt.

“Come with me,” said Sheppard, who, fortunately, recollected all at once the place spoken of by Blueskin, in Gilbert’s-passage, Clare-market. “I know of a safe retreat. This way.”

He turned down a court as he spoke, and from his intimate acquaintance with the ramifications of that locality, soon reached the place of which he had spoken.

Jonathan Wild’s two late janizaries kept close to his heels.

Having taken the decided step they had, they felt that their safety depended upon their keeping close to him.

The “Fountain,” was the name of a small beer-house, kept by one George Stokoe, in Gilbert-passage, and it was before this house that the three paused.

It was closed, and there was no sign to indicate that it was inhabited by any one.

But Jack, without ceremony, mounted the crumbling steps before the door, and turning his back to it, kicked furiously with his heels against the panel.

So imperious a demand for admission was quickly attended to.

The mention of Blueskin’s name was quite sufficient.

A capital repast was quickly spread before them, for upon entering they found the interior belied the exterior, for the inmates were all astir.

This disposed of, they lay down to rest, a thing of which Jack stood greatly in need, but his mind was too much agitated for him to enjoy a refreshing slumber.

When it was dark they ventured to descend.

The first question Jack asked was whether they had seen Blueskin.

The landlord replied in the negative.

This made the two men hang back a little.

Sheppard noticed the difference in their behaviour instantly.

He was unwilling for them to leave him, so he said—

“Blueskin will not be long before he comes.”

“Are you sure, Jack?”

“Quite certain.”

“Because if I thought”—

“What?”

“That if he was not coming pretty soon I should be off.”

“So should I,” said Blewitt, for it was Flood who spoke.

“Pho! pho!” laughed Jack; “I tell you it will be all right; take my word for it. However, not to keep anything from you, I think it very likely Blueskin won’t be here until to-morrow morning.”

“To-morrow morning?”

“He may come before, but I don’t expect him.”

As the reader knows, Jack had no grounds for speaking in the way he did, but having commenced the deception, he was obliged to keep it up, at any rate, a little longer, and then, if no tidings of his comrade could be heard, he would have to break it to them gradually.

But somehow he had a feeling at his heart, amounting almost to conviction, that Blueskin would not fall into the hands of Wild.

Time will show whether he was right.

Edgworth Bess, and the circumstance of her mysterious disappearance, was uppermost in his mind.

He had, however, but little hopes of finding her after the elapsion of so long a time, but yet he could not quite relinquish it.

“Mat,” he said, addressing Flood.

“Yes, Jack.”

“I want to go out on a little expedition to-night; will you come with me?”

“I have no objections. Have you, Blewitt?”

“No, none as I knows on. But what’s the lay?”

“I want to find some one.”

“Oh!”

“Some one who I managed to get out of the clutches of Jonathan Wild, but somehow or other she has disappeared.”

“She!”

“Yes. Do not ask me for any further explanation now, because I cannot give it. Will you come with me?”

“With all my heart.”

“Then make what change in your dress you can, in order that you may not be readily known, and I will do the same.”

“Agreed.”

A few minutes after this all three were in the street.

Jack Sheppard remembered the conversation he had had with Blueskin as to the mode in which the search should be conducted, and he resolved to act according to it.

He went, therefore, by a circuitous and unfrequented route to Newgate-market.

After a little trouble, he found the place where the secret door was situated leading into Wild’s house.

From this point he searched over the whole market; but, of course, without meeting with anything to reward his trouble.

Then he went to the gateway leading into Warwick-lane.

That narrow, dismal thoroughfare was now quite silent and deserted.

There was no one of whom he could make an inquiry.

Passing down Warwick-lane, he went into Paternoster-row.

At Amen-corner he paused.

Four routes were open before him, either one of which he thought was just as likely to be taken by the poor girl as another.

His heart sank when he saw how very, very faint was the chance of discovering any clue to her whereabouts.

In fact, he was almost ready to despair.

Here, also, there was no one of whom he could make inquiry. The whole neighbourhood appeared deserted.

At last he emerged on to Ludgate-hill.

“I will take this way to Johnson’s,” said Jack, to himself. “It is the most direct route. I will examine every inch of the way, but I fear it will be to no purpose.”

With these thoughts in his mind, he descended the hill, and made his way into Fleet-street.

At the corner was a watchman’s box.

Here, he thought, was a chance, though a bare one. This watchman might have seen her. He would question the man and see.

After a while, the guardian of the night was aroused from a deep slumber into which he had fallen.

“Hullo!” he said, “thieves! murder!”

He would have sprung his rattle, only Jack seized him by the hand.

Then he questioned him upon the point so dear to him, but in vain. He could obtain no satisfactory reply.

Wearily he walked up Fleet-street until the corner of Fetter-lane was reached, where he espied another watch-box.

He knew it would be useless to inquire, or, rather, feared it would be, but yet he determined not to let any chance, however remote or faint, pass by.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

JACK SHEPPARD HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHNSON, THE LANDLORD, AND FLOOD PROPOSES TO BREAK INTO JOHN ROOTS’ HOUSE.

It will be remembered when the Mohawks chased poor Edgworth Bess along the streets, some of their number had noticed the very watch-box before which Jack and his two companions now stopped, and had gone through the pleasant little diversion of “coffining” him.

With some little difficulty, Jack Sheppard managed to elicit from him a clear enough account of the affair as to leave but little doubt upon his mind that she whom he sought had been hunted through the streets by this band of dissolute young men.

No stranger was he to their doings.

Often and often had he heard their deeds of cruelty related to him.

And poor Bess had been hunted by them.

Hunted, perhaps, to death.

Of course, all the information he could get from the watchman was that they chased her towards Temple-bar.

In this direction he now went.

But the empty, silent street now showed no signs of what had taken place a night or so before.

Passing under the grim archway, he came at length to that circular part of the Strand to the north of St. Clement's Church, which is known as Pickett-street.

This was the very spot where the Mohawks had come up with their prey.

But this Jack knew not.

His heart burned like fire within him.

Rage and despair struggled for supremacy.

Alas! to him there was every probability that he had looked upon the face of the poor persecuted girl, whom he had so often defended, for the last time.

"This looks like no go, Jack," said Flood, at length.

"Don't be like that. What are we to do next?"

An angry rejoinder came to his lips, but he had the prudence to check it ere he gave it utterance.

It was no good making more enemies than he had already.

Curbing himself, he said—

"I am afraid it is as you say, but yet I shall not despair—I shall cling tight to hope to the last."

He looked round him as he spoke, but there was no one whatever, except themselves in view.

What had poor Jack to guide him in the slightest?

Nothing.

On he went. Past the church palings and into Wych-street again.

At the top of Wych-street was the "Black Lion."

Had the kind-hearted landlord, Johnson, heard since he saw him last some news respecting her? Perhaps he might have done, but how was he to ascertain?

The old inn would doubtless be well guarded by Jonathan Wild's men.

Still it would be a satisfaction to learn whether there was any intelligence, and so he determined, let the risk be what it might, that he would go there once more and inquire.

Having come to this resolution, he stepped forward at a quicker pace.

To go up Wych-street he would have to pass his late master's house.

It was twice he had seen it in a short interval.

The first time the reader knows with what revengeful and passionate feelings he had stood before it; but this outbreak was calmness in comparison with the storm that burst forth when he saw it the second time.

"John Roots, you laugh at the boy's expressions, and take no heed of them. He has passed your house twice—beware of the third time!"

Dashing onwards, Jack soon left the shop behind, and came in sight of the public-house.

He halted on the opposite side of the way, and shrunk back into the shadow of the houses as much as he could, so that no casual glance would discover him.

The exterior of the "Black Lion" presented its usual appearance.

Loud laughter, boisterous songs, and the clanking of drinking vessels reached the ear, telling too plainly of the furious merriment that was going on within.

A bright light from the partially-curtained windows streamed out into the dark, deserted street.

But, beyond this, there was nothing to be seen about the place that would cause suspicion.

Jack hesitated a moment, and then turning round to his two followers, he said—

"Wait here for me, I shall not be a moment. At all risks I will cross over and ask Johnson whether he has seen or heard anything of her."

Then, without waiting to hear the reply, he ran across

the road, and disappeared in the low doorway of the inn.

He pushed open the half-glass door.

A glance was sufficient to show him that the passage, at least, was clear.

Like a ghost, he glided into the kitchen.

This was the back apartment, where Johnson and his household usually sat. It was not exactly a private room, yet it was not a public one.

One or two persons were seated in it, besides the landlord and his wife.

But Jack knew them not.

Pulling his hat down as closely as he could over his forehead, in order to conceal his features as much as possible, he sat down upon a vacant seat, and beckoned Johnson to him.

"Have you heard anything of her?" he asked, anxiously.

"Good heavens! it's Jack."

"Yes, I am here. Have you heard of her?"

"Not a word, Jack, but hark! What made you so foolish as to come here? The place is full of men—some regular police-officers, and some Jonathan's crew. How you managed to get in without their seeing you is a mystery. It strikes me you won't go out so easily."

The landlord spoke with great rapidity, in a low but energetic tone of voice.

"I care not," replied Jack, as he placed his elbows on the table, and let his head fall between his palms, "I care not now what becomes of me. She is lost to me for ever."

"Come, come, cheer up! Her disappearance looks strange, and yet she may be in perfect safety. What does Blueskin say?"

"I know not whether he is alive or dead."

"True, the men here told me how he had jumped off Blackfriars-bridge, and how Jonathan had got into a boat and chased him down the Thames."

"Did he catch him?"

"I don't know, but I fancy not. I can't get them to speak about the latter part of the affair, and that's what made me ask you."

"I trust he has got off!"

"So do I. But come, Jack, it will not do for you to despair! Sit still a moment where you are, and I will fetch you some brandy."

Johnson left his side, but was soon back again with a large glass of raw brandy, which he placed on the table before him.

"There," he said, "drink that. Take my word for it, you will be better afterwards. Throw despair to the dogs! Drink, and be a man!"

Thus adjured, Jack lifted the strong spirit to his lips and swallowed a good half of it at a single gulp.

"That's right, Jack! Now, again!"

"No, I have had enough!"

"Tush! try again! What you have had is not enough to do you good! Drink the rest!"

Jack emptied the glass.

"You will be all right now. And just listen to what I have got to say. Don't fall into your enemies' hands if you can help it. Wait until you see Blueskin before you do anything. Will you promise me that?"

"I will."

"Off with you, then, and seek some place of safety, for this will no longer be a refuge for you! But where shall you go? Tell me, so that if I should want to find you I shall be able to do so."

"At the 'Fountain,' in Gilbert's-passage."

"Good! I know it well. Take care to get there unobserved. The longer you stay where you are the greater will be your danger! Off with you!"

Jack arose.

The spirits he had drank had not failed to produce their full effect upon him, as they would upon any one not habituated to their use.

"Johnson," he said, "see that the coast is clear."

"All right."

He disappeared, and was absent about a moment.

Then he returned.

"Wild's men are in the front room," he said. "They are drinking, but as I went to the door I saw them look at me."

"What is to be done?"

"You might go out without them recognising you, but then again you might not! It will be a little trouble, but it will be best to make sure!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. Do you recollect I once took you down the cellar, and showed you a way into my house in White Hart-street?"

"To be sure I do!"

"Well, then, that is what I meant! Come on, you will be able to slip into the bar unperceived, and when that is done the rest will follow easily enough!"

"So it will."

"Follow me, then, quietly! Don't seem to be in a hurry, or agitated, and ten to one if you are noticed!"

With this the landlord, closely followed by Jack, led the way into the bar, the door of which he closed behind him.

Then, lighting a candle, he preceded him down a flight of steps. The same as described in a previous chapter of this history.

It is needless, having already done so, to repeat minutely all the details. It will be enough to say that he entered the secret passage and emerged from it in safety.

He did not tarry a moment, however, at Johnson's other house, but made his way to that part of Drury-lane where he had left his two companions.

He found them both there waiting for him.

"No luck," he said.

"She has not been there?"

"No."

"Where next?"

"I promised to go back to Gilbert's passage, because there are so many of Jonathan's men hanging about."

"Oh! well!" said Flood. "Will you listen to me, Jack?"

"Yes."

"While you have been gone, we have been thinking about you and your master, and we have come to the conclusion that he is a downright bad one!"

"Curse him!"

"Just so. Now, I'll tell you what we have thought."

"What?"

"That we would serve him out!"

"Serve him out?"

"Yes; and it remains for you to say whether you'll help us."

"I have sworn to be revenged upon him for all the misery he has caused me!" cried Jack Sheppard, "and, as I live and breathe, I will keep my oath!"

"Bravo!" said Flood.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND HIS TWO COMPANIONS COMMIT A BURGLARY AT THE CARPENTER'S IN WYCH-STREET.

"SPEAK out!" said Jack; "tell me at once what you mean."

"Very good."

"Go on, then."

"We have just considered how you might be well and fully revenged upon him."

"But how?"

"The street is quiet," said Flood.

"Not a mouse stirring," added Blewitt.

"What then?"

"We will just crack his crib for him."

"Too dangerous."

"Do you think so, Jack?"

"To-night I do."

"Why?"

"Because, when I was in at the 'Black Lion' yonder, the place was full of Jonathan's men, who are keeping a sharp look-out for us."

"The deuce they are!"

"They have no suspicion as yet, I feel confident; but a little thing will suffice to arouse it."

"What do you say, Flood?" asked Blewitt.

"Why, I say this. That! for Jonathan's men."

He snapped his fingers as he spoke.

"But the crib?"

"I say, crack it. You will be safe, enough, Jack; and, I take it, that will be the best way of having your revenge."

"You know all the ins and outs of the place, I suppose?" said Blewitt.

"Quite well."

"Then it will be as easy as daylight."

"Now, Jack, you had better do it."

Jack hesitated.

The proposal came upon him quite unexpectedly.

Many things prompted him to accede to it.

In the first place there was the deep-rooted, angry feeling he had against his former master, John Roots, a feeling which had been called into existence by that person's ill-treatment of him.

He had sworn to be revenged.

Here there was an ample opportunity of gratifying it, for he well knew that his master was one of those persons who never think their money is safe without it is in their own possession.

Consequently, being a man well to do, and of a frugal disposition, he had in his house a very large sum of money. His whole worldly wealth, in fact.

Jack, from having been so long an inmate of the house, of course knew quite well where the box containing the treasure was kept.

He knew, too, that if he took it, the ruin of John Roots would follow.

And would it not be fair, he asked himself, to give him back as good as he had sent.

Had he not ruined him?

Why, then, it would be only fair that Jack should pay him back in his own coin.

He thought so.

Besides, he could tell the men he had with him were wavering and unsteady.

A little thing would serve to turn them against him, and then how hopeless would his position be.

He did not wish it to be seen that he complied with their request for that reason, for if he had he would have lost all mastery over them.

If he refused they might, perhaps, turn round quite against him.

If, on the other hand, he agreed, it would most likely be the means of conciliating them.

And so, with all these reflections bearing in one direction, it is not wonderful that he consented.

The proximity of Wild's myrmidons would add considerably to the peril of the undertaking, but Jack just then was not in the humour to care for that.

His blood was heated and his brain inflamed by the brandy which had been given him by Joe Johnson.

"It shall be done," he cried; "old Roots shall repent the past this night!"

"Hurrah! Jack—I thought we should please you."

"There will be plenty of booty to repay us for our trouble," continued Sheppard.

"Better still."

"Somewhere in his house there is a large chest in which he keeps his money."

"How much?"

"All he is worth, for he will never trust it in a bank. All the money he receives, all the money he has saved, he keeps in this box."

"You don't say so?"

"He is a careful man, if you know what that means?"

"What!"

"A miser!"

"I thought as much; but, Jack, do you really mean to say that there is so much in this old crib worth the looking after?"

"There is. But it won't do to stand talking here about it. Let us get to action."

"Bravo, Jack!"

"Here is the house."

They paused before the carpenter's dwelling as they spoke.

All three looked up at it.

None of the inmates were up—at least there was no light to be seen at any of the windows.

The street was quite empty.

The burglars now only spoke in whispers, fearful lest the sound of their voices should be carried upon the still night air to unfriendly ears.

They were quite unprovided with tools—at least such implements as they would have chosen had they have



[HOW BLUESKIN BAFFLED JONATHAN WILD.]

contemplated the enterprise earlier, and so have been able to provide themselves with proper tools.

But all three were armed with large-bladed clasp knives, and Blewitt had in his pocket a bunch of skeleton keys.

With these, then, they would have to achieve their object.

They had, however, very little doubt their efforts would prove successful.

"The window," said Jack; "the shop window. You will get in easiest through there."

"But the shutters?"

"Oh! you will easily manage them."

"How?"

"There are two hinges. Get your knives and cut away the wood round them."

"Capital."

"We shall then be able to get in without leaving anything to excite suspicion if a person should happen to go by."

"So we shall."

It will be necessary, in order to understand this, to explain what sort of shutters they were that protected the windows of John Roots' shop.

The kind is one that has, since the introduction of plate glass, fallen into complete disuse.

Some years ago they were to be met with in remote country villages, but even there only very seldom.

The shutter, then, was composed of a large piece of wood, hung upon two horizontal hinges fixed to the window-sill.

When fastened, the shutter was lifted up bodily like a flap—or, rather, huge box lid—and secured at the top by an iron cotter and pin.

By attacking the lower part of the shutter in the manner proposed by Jack, it would, when the wood was quite cut away from the hinges, hang loosely suspended by the fastener at the top, so that, unless upon a particular observation, it would not be noticed that it had at all been tampered with.

With great speed and energy the two men set about the task assigned to them, and although their knives were sharp, the wood was so hard that it was a long while before they accomplished it.

At length, however, it was finished.

Raising the shutter a little way, they next proceeded to attack the window itself.

This, as it was of the old-fashioned latticed description, did not prove an obstacle worthy of the name. The lead round the panes yielded easily.

So noiseless were they in all these operations, that not the least alarm was raised.

In less than two minutes all three stood inside the shop.

It was not until this moment that they remembered they were unprovided with one of the most necessary things of all.

And that was a light.

How they had omitted this in their calculations, they could not tell.

"This is a nice state of things," said Flood. "What are we to do, Jack?"

"We must have a light," said Blewitt.

"That is very true, but I have not got one. Have neither of you?"

"Only some matches."

"Stop. Then I think we shall do."

"How?"

"Light one of them. I know the old crib well, as you may imagine, and I shall find the place where the candles are kept without much trouble, and we must do the best we can with one of them."

"Good," said Blewitt, and as he spoke he produced from his pocket a bottle of phosphorous and a few "thieves' matches," as they were called, from the fact of their being ignited without noise.

The flame was a tiny one, but yet the light it gave was sufficient to enable Jack to find his way across the shop without coming into contact with any of the various objects which it contained.

Pushing open a half-glass door, he entered the little room behind the shop.

In one corner of this apartment was another door, which Jack opened, but the moment he did so, the half-burned match he carried was extinguished by a sudden and violent current of cold air.

This door, in fact, was the one leading to the cellars.

Jack did not need the light now, he just passed his hand behind the door, and produced a candle.

Another match was struck by Blewitt, and it was lighted.

This difficulty, then, was over, though, had not Jack been as intimately acquainted with the premises as he was, it would have proved a very serious one indeed.

"This way," said Jack, "and be silent. Here are the stairs."

Again recommending his two followers to silence, Jack led the way up the staircase, towards the sleeping apartments in John Roots' house.

All within the dwelling was as still as death, and the three burglars stole up the stairs like three grim spectres.

Now and then, however, despite their utmost care, the timeworn wood would creak beneath their tread, but the stridulous sound would, if heard by anyone, be thought nothing of in the night.

At length the landing on the first floor was reached.

Jack did not speak, but by a motion indicated which was the door opening into the carpenter's bedroom.

Too well did the apprentice know that his master made it an invariable practice to lock the door, and place the key beneath his pillow.

He pointed to the keyhole.

Blewitt understood him.

Cautiously advancing, he took from his pocket his bunch of skeleton keys, and having selected one which he thought most likely to answer his purpose, he gently inserted it in the lock.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

EXPLAINS HOW IT WAS THAT BLUESKIN ESCAPED FROM WILD UPON THE THAMES, AND RELATES HOW HE TOOK REFUGE IN A LODGING-HOUSE IN SOUTHWARK.

So long a time has elapsed since we took any cognizance of the proceedings of Blueskin, that we feel we cannot

any longer suffer our attention to be diverted from him.

The whole of the remarkable incidents which took place upon the occasion of Jonathan Wild chasing him down the Thames will doubtless be fresh in the recollection of the reader, so it will be unnecessary for us to recapitulate them.

The first shot which Wild fired at him while standing on the steps was an effective one.

He had just risen to the surface after his tremendous dive, and was dizzy and breathless.

He saw nothing, for the water blinded him.

Ere, however, he could clear the hair from before his eyes, and recover himself, he heard a sudden shout, a loud report, and then felt a stinging sensation along his neck, which told him in a moment that he had been struck by a bullet.

The impulse to cry out in the manner he did was one that could not be controlled.

He sank.

Down—down—seemingly for miles down beneath the surface of the muddy river he seemed to go, until he lost all consciousness of the distance.

Then he rose again, and, by the ere instinct of self-preservation, struck out his arms.

Blueskin was an excellent swimmer.

The tide carried him down the river, and what with that and his own exertions, he went at a very rapid rate indeed.

He was not allowed time enough to make more than a dozen strokes before he heard the report of another pistol.

He ducked his head instantly.

This time, however, he was not hit.

As long as he could he swam with his head under water, but his breath soon compelled him to draw in more air.

The first sounds he heard were the shouts of Wild's men in the boat.

He was seen.

He was pursued.

His heart sank within him, and he gave himself up for lost.

How was he, wounded and weak from loss of blood as he was, to hope to escape from his enemies when they chased him in a boat.

For a little while his speed might perhaps be greater than theirs, but he would be the first to grow exhausted.

Then he would fall into their hands an easy prey.

His wound, however, he quickly found not to be a serious one, and then the cold water, besides having the effect of materially stanching the blood, mitigated the pain which it would otherwise have caused.

For this much, then, he had to be thankful.

From his old friend and acquaintance, but now bitter foe, Jonathan Wild, he felt he had everything to dread. Having learned that he had escaped the death to which he fancied he had doomed him, he would now spare no effort to capture and slay him.

Love of life is one of the strongest impulses implanted in the breasts of human beings, and in obedience to the dictates of this feeling, he summoned up all the strength he possessed to do battle with the waves, for he felt he had yet much to live for.

Already have we seen how he managed to keep ahead of Wild's boat, and how, in spite of their utmost exertions to prevent it, he had gained the shadow of the boats that lay moored on the Surrey side of London-bridge.

But then a most mysterious and inexplicable circumstance occurred.

From those very boats had come a swimmer, who, naturally enough, Wild and his men took to be the person of whom they were in chase.

Under this impression, one of them had taken as careful and as steady an aim as he could, and fired.

The swimmer was hit, as was abundantly manifested by the quantity of blood which gushed from his head and face, and dyed the water around him.

He turned with great rapidity over and over, as though in the agonies of death.

Then, by means of a couple of boat-hooks, the body was drawn through the water and over the gunwale into the boat.

To the horror and astonishment of Wild, it was not Blueskin!

One glance at the bruised and bleeding form was

enough to assure him of this beyond all possibility of doubt.

In vain, as we have seen, did he endeavour to frame some hypothesis that would account for this most unparalleled circumstance.

He was completely baffled.

As a last hope, he had caused a thorough search to be made of all the boats lying at their moorings, but that search did not result in the discovery of the object which he sought.

Quite defeated, he had left the spot.

But though this remained so inexplicable to the thief-taker, it will not to our readers.

Incomprehensible as it seemed, it in reality was about the simplest thing in the world.

Blueskin reached the boats.

The first one to which he came was a huge, clumsy vessel, built more with a view to transporting heavy burdens than for swiftness.

He had made a tremendous effort to reach these boats. It had been almost beyond him, but he managed it. He knew that was the sole chance he had of escaping from a dreadful death.

But he would have failed, certainly, had they been ten yards further off than they were.

He swam behind this boat.

His foe was no longer in sight.

Now was the chance.

The faint morning light that fell upon the bosom of the river Thames showed him the thick iron chain by which the boat was moored.

He clutched it tightly.

Then, straining his powers to the utmost, he drew himself up it, and rolled over the edge into the boat.

What it was he fell upon he could not for a moment think.

It was soft.

But his doubts were quickly put to rest; for, by the movement of it and a faint cry, he knew it was a human being.

In fact, it was the man who had been set to watch the boat during the night.

But, wearied out with his lonely vigil, he had, just as the dawn began to show itself in the sky, laid down and fallen asleep.

Of course, the shock of Blueskin falling upon him aroused him from his slumber.

But ere he could give an alarm, a hand was pressed tightly over his mouth.

Then, with the suddenness almost of a lightning flash, there darted across Blueskin's mind the thought that this man might aid him in making his escape.

No sooner did the idea occur to him than he proceeded to put it into execution.

Seizing the only partially-conscious man in his powerful grasp, he forced him over the side of the boat, and let him slip into the water.

This he was careful to do quietly, so that there was no splash made whatever.

"Swim for your life!" said Blueskin, in a suppressed whisper; "swim for your life! Utter the least cry, and I will send a bullet through your skull! Swim off for your life!"

The half-bewildered man obeyed.

Eagerly did he watch his progress.

Away—away he went, and then Blueskin heard the roar which Jonathan gave when, as he imagined, he saw his prey swimming towards him.

Then followed the pistol shot.

For an instant—or, perhaps, not so long—Blueskin was undecided how to act.

He did not know how far the stratagem he had put into practice would prove successful, nor how long the deception under which Jonathan laboured would continue.

Should he remain where he was in the boat, and either personate the man he had in so summary a manner ejected, or conceal himself within it? Or should he commit himself again to the river, and swim ashore?

This latter he had an opportunity now of doing.

It would be, perhaps, the safest, so he resolved to try it.

With the greatest speed, therefore, he lowered himself over the boards into the water.

But when he entered it, he found his strength was much

diminished, and, short as the distance was which intervened between him and the shore, he was filled with dread that he should find himself incompetent to reach it.

Still, having met with so much success as he had done hitherto, he felt himself stimulated to make the attempt.

When the mind is firmly fixed upon any object, it is very rarely indeed that it is not attained, and so it was in the present instance with Blueskin.

Undetected by any one, he wound his way among the vessels, for so close were they together, and so black the shadow that they cast, that it would have needed a very keen eye to have discovered him.

The shore was reached just at the moment Jonathan arrived at the first of the moored vessels, and caused the search to be made.

The tide, as we have before mentioned, was running out, and had now about reached the turn, consequently, Blueskin had to scramble through a quantity of thick, black, oozy mud.

Although he knew his strength was ebbing from him every moment, still he toiled manfully on, and at last had the satisfaction of fairly reaching dry ground.

He was then compelled to lie down at full length, for his exhaustion was so great that he could proceed no further.

The activity, however, with which the search of the vessels was being carried on, warned him to remove as quickly as he could, for fear lest, after all, he should be taken.

Scrambling, therefore, with no little difficulty to his feet, he staggered rather than walked along a narrow thoroughfare, bordered on each side by tall warehouses.

Anxiously did he look up and down to the right and to the left, for a friendly light which would indicate a place where he would be able to obtain shelter, but no such met his view.

Still he went on.

Every now and then he was forced to clutch the sides of the buildings by which he passed, in order to prevent himself from falling heavily to the ground.

At length he reached a place where a narrow street branched off from the one he was traversing.

The buildings in it were low and squalid.

But this he did not notice.

There was something else which attracted the whole of his attention.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

BLUESKIN INCURS GREAT PERIL IN THE LODGING-HOUSE IN SOUTHWARK, AND HAS TO FIGHT HARD FOR LIFE.

ABOUT twenty paces down the street was a dimly-burning oil-lamp, which, from its position, was evidently suspended from a bracket before the door of one of the dwellings.

This seemed to point to a place where he would be able to obtain rest and shelter, the two things of which he stood so much in need.

Whereabouts he was, or what was the name of the street, he had no idea whatever, and, as he just then felt, this was a thing not likely to much trouble him.

Taking every step with greater difficulty than its predecessor, he crawled towards this light, which, though it burned, seemed every moment to be on the point of expiring.

Upon a closer approach, he perceived that the house before which it hung was one of those lodging-houses of which, even at the present day, there are so many along the banks of the Thames.

That the establishment was patronized by none but the very dregs of society could be seen at once. A respectable person, or one with any money about him, would never have dreamed of entering the neighbourhood.

Southwark, a hundred and forty years ago, was really a most horrible place, and those who know the locality at the present day will readily admit that there is even now ample room for improvement in many respects.

The door of this house Blueskin found standing invitingly open. In fact, it was very rarely closed, for those who slept upon the premises were rather eccentric with respect to the periods when they took that very necessary refreshment.

With a great deal of difficulty the stone steps leading up to the door were ascended, and the narrow, dingy passage gained.

Down this, however, he managed to slowly make his way, until he reached a small square aperture in the wall—dignified by the name of the bar-window—at which sat a most repulsive-looking woman.

Her dress hung in tatters about her.

Her hair was in disorder.

Her face was begrimed with dirt, and her eyes were bleared and bloodshot.

"What do you want?" she asked, in shrill, querulous tones, for she was never over-civil, even to her best customers.

"Rest," said Blueskin, in as firm and loud a voice as he could command. "I will pay you well for it."

He struck his pocket as he spoke.

The jingling sound produced had an instantaneous effect upon the old haridan.

"Yes, sir; to be sure; I will attend to you in one moment, sir."

She sprang off the stool upon which she had been sitting as she spoke, and, opening a door, emerged into the passage.

"I have had to fly for my life," exclaimed Blueskin, as he noted the effect which his bedraggled appearance had upon the hostess. "I have had to fly for my life, and am well nigh exhausted. Let me rest awhile, and that I will pay you well for your accommodation, let that be an earnest."

While speaking, he plunged his hand into the pocket of his trousers and produced a guinea.

The eyes of the old woman glistened with an unholy lustre as the yellow coin was dropped into her palm.

"Thanks, good sir; thanks," she said. "You shall have the best which the poor place affords, which is not much however. Walk in here, sir, if you please."

With an obsequiousness that was really sickening, when the cause which had produced it was known, the woman ushered him into the little chamber where she had been sitting.

It was a truly miserable den, entirely destitute of every thing in the shape of comfort.

The ceiling was grimed with soot.

The walls positively reeking with filth.

But, bad as the place was, Blueskin was right glad to seat himself upon the chair which the old woman officiously placed for him.

"Is there anything more you would like?" she asked. "There is no licence to this house, but I can send out for anything you want."

"No—no! Never mind! I shall do! A rest is all I require!"

"Very good, sir! Perhaps you would like a bed, though. If you would, I can let you have one. A private room, all to yourself."

"Can you?"

"I can, sir."

"Then I will accept your offer."

The woman's eyes glistened as the words reached her ears, but with some trouble she concealed her exultation.

"I will see to the room being got ready, then, for you, if you won't mind waiting a minute."

"Very good."

With eager haste, the old woman left the bar, carefully closing the door after her.

That caution which usually attended Blueskin, seemed on the present occasion to have abandoned him.

He noticed not the sinister appearance of the place, nor the avaricious look upon the old hag's countenance.

He had assented to taking a bed, not only because he so much wanted rest, but because he should be more out of the way in case search should be made for him; and from what he knew of the great thief-taker he felt pretty sure there very soon would be.

The thought of the amount of personal peril he might be incurring by his sojourn in the suspicious-looking lodging-house never entered his mind.

Yet none knew much better than himself how many fearful dens there were along the water-side, into which it would be the height of imprudence for any one to venture.

But there is every allowance to be made for his being, on the present occasion, blind to danger.

It may be as well to remind the reader that he had about his person the whole of the money and valuables which had fallen into his hands during his highway

expedition with Jack Sheppard, and this was no inconsiderable amount.

At any rate, the old woman must have had some very powerful motive for being so civil to one whose appearance would certainly never of itself have commanded it.

But we will not anticipate events by explaining what her motives were just at present.

She was only absent a few minutes.

"Now, sir," she said, as she returned, "all is ready, if you will follow me."

Blueskin rose.

He felt sick and faint.

Not only was there the immersion in the cold Thames, but also the wound in the neck, which the bullet from Wild's pistol had inflicted.

This, though not what would be exactly called serious, was yet more than skin deep, and a great quantity of blood had effused from it.

From these two causes combined, then, it can be easily seen that he must be dreadfully exhausted. Indeed, few frames could have endured one half so much.

Right glad was he to follow the landlady of the lodging-house out of the bar, across a passage, and up a flight of dirty, crazy stairs.

At the top of these were several doors, one of which she opened, and allowed him to enter a small room, in which the first thing he noticed was a fire.

From its appearance it had evidently just been lighted.

Through the window came just enough morning light to make the different objects visible.

"This is our best room, sir," said the landlady, with a wave of the hand. "You will find everything quite comfortable."

"No doubt—no doubt. Just listen to me."

"Yes, sir."

"If any one comes here to make inquiries whether you have seen a man answering to my description, just say no."

The woman nodded.

"It will be nothing out of your pocket," added Blake. "There are those after me who would gladly take my life; but so far I have escaped them, and shall do so altogether, if"—

"If I am silent," said the landlady. "Lor' bless you, sir, I never knows nothing about my customers, if people come and inquire. Don't be afraid, you'll be as safe here as if you was"—

She paused for a simile.

"As if I was in my coffin," added Blueskin.

"Lor!" said she, as she gave a great start.

"Leave me. I have money, and will pay you well for your assistance. Leave me, I must rest."

"You won't have nothing to drink?"

"No—no!"

"Very good, sir. Just as you like, sir, of course."

"I don't half like that woman," said Blueskin, as the landlady closed the door after her. "She is no good, I know, but she had better not play any tricks with me, or she will find she has got the wrong fellow to deal with."

Going to the fire, he gave it a good poke, which caused the fuel to burn up briskly, and burst into a blaze.

His next proceeding, before lying down, was to dry his clothes.

This he did by standing before the fire. The easiest and best plan would have been, of course, to take off his clothes and dry them, but there were several reasons why he thought it would be injudicious to do this.

Not the least of them was the dread that he had that Wild might find him out, and if he did the only chance he would have of defending himself would be lost to him if he was undressed.

While drying himself, he also bound up his wound as well as he was able, for, from some cause or other, it had begun to bleed afresh.

In a little while after this, being quite overpowered, he sank down upon the bed, and dropped into a deep slumber.

By this time it was quite broad day, but a thick, dark-coloured curtain, which hung before the window, prevented the light from entering, except in a subdued fashion.

About a quarter of an hour after Blueskin fell asleep, the handle of the door was turned cautiously and silently.

No further movement was then made for about a minute.

At the expiry of that interval, however, the door itself was gradually pushed open.

The hinge creaked slightly.

But this was disregarded.

Presently the door was opened far enough for a head to be projected between its edge and the jamb into the room.

It was an old man's head.

The hair, long and straggling, was a grizzly gray.

His skin was puckered up into many deep wrinkles.

For only a moment did the head appear, and then it was withdrawn again, but that moment sufficed for the deeply-set eagle eyes within to take a survey of the whole apartment.

Blueskin slumbered.

His attitude and stertorous breathing at once proclaimed that fact.

The head reappeared, and, after listening again to make sure all was well, the old man crept into the chamber.

He assumed a strange crouching attitude, and his head shook tremulously from side to side as though afflicted with some palsical complaint.

Then, turning round, he beckoned with his finger to some one without.

The summons was obeyed.

A woman entered.

It was the landlady.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

THE LANDLADY OF THE LODGING-HOUSE AND THE OLD MAN CAME TO A VERY BAD END INDEED.

The faint light which struggled through the thick curtain drawn across the window distinctly revealed the countenances of these two persons.

No human eye was there to look upon and note the expression which they wore.

Had there been, unless, indeed, their nerves were iron, they would have shuddered with horror as they saw it.

Stamped upon each, in the most legible characters, was the word, murder!

That was their awful errand to that silent room.

The money which they supposed Blueskin to have about him was doubtless the incentive to the horrid deed.

Money, indeed, was the god they both worshipped with a fervour and a zeal that would in former times, directed to a different object, have caused their bones to be canonized, and their names revered as saints.

The old man made a gesture to the old woman, which she immediately comprehended.

She reclosed the door, and stooping down, slipped a bolt into its socket.

Despite the care with which this operation was performed, she could not help it making a slight sound, which caused them, like guilty creatures as they were, to start violently.

But it would have required a ten times louder noise than that was to have aroused Blueskin from his heavy sleep.

Satisfied that no alarm had been given, the pair crawled towards the bed.

The dimensions of the room were limited, so it was quickly reached.

The slumberer's position was one in every way suited to the consummation of their purpose.

He lay upon his back, his limbs stretched out to their full length, and his head thrown back, leaving the neck naked and exposed.

But this attitude served also to show the muscular development of their guest, and to show them how formidable an antagonist he would be, unless they took him at unawares.

The contrast between him and the two wretches by whom his life was menaced was great indeed.

Of the two the old man appeared to be the strongest, but what the woman lacked in strength was more than compensated for by coolness of nerve.

And now, having reached the bed, they did not hesitate a single moment.

From some place in the breast of her clothing the hideous old woman drew forth a knife.

The haft was white, and the blade long, sharp, and glittering.

It looked as though it had originally been a carving-knife, and ground down to its present dagger-like shape. Grasping it firmly by the hilt, she raised it above her head.

With her other hand she felt for the slumberer's heart. This was the point at which she aimed. It might have been previous experience that had taught her that that was the surest and quickest way of robbing one of life.

The old man stood by quietly—his turn had not come to take part in these diabolical and murderous proceedings.

The precious landlady, having found her mark, now brought the knife down with full force and suddenness upon Blueskin's breast.

But a result ensued for which she was quite unprepared. The point of the weapon, instead of sinking into soft flesh, as she expected, struck against some hard substance like iron or steel.

She uttered a howl of agony, and let the knife fall from her bruised fingers.

A terrible cry also burst from Blueskin's lips, for, of course, this had awakened him.

He had laid down with his hanger drawn and handy to his grasp.

Seizing it, therefore—although when he did so he could not be said to be thoroughly awake—he sprang to his feet.

Yelling for mercy, the old man sank down upon his knees.

But the landlady rushed to the door, and made a frantic attempt to leave the room.

"Stop!" said Blueskin, as with his left hand he drew a pistol from his belt and held it at arm's length. "Stop, or I fire."

His accents were so full of determination that the woman, perforce, obeyed.

"Now," he continued, "explain this this moment! Make the least movement, either to attack me or to escape, and I will slay you without mercy. It is fortunate I wore over my heart a piece of highly-tempered steel. It has been the means of saving my life upon more than one occasion. Now, then, what was the meaning of this attack upon my life?"

"Mercy—mercy!"

"I will show none if you do not speak at once."

"Spare our lives, good sir! Spare our lives!"

"What right have you to make such a prayer? But all will depend upon your answer. Do you hear me? Was it to rob me that you wished to take my life?"

"Ye-s, sir. Mercy—mercy!"

"No one set you on?"

"No—no, sir, no."

The idea appeared to hold momentary possession of Blueskin's mind that some one had instigated them to murder him, but a moment's thought told him that it was an absurd one.

Avarice—the sin that has prompted the commission of more sins than aught else—was the sole motive that had actuated the poor wretches before him.

He knew not what other people there might be in the house ready and willing to render them assistance, and in his weak state he would easily be overpowered by numbers; and so it was his best policy to get out of the house as quickly as possible.

But he was unwilling to do so without inflicting some punishment upon those who had in so base a manner attempted to take his life, though, having asked for mercy, he did not like to slay them in cold blood, though, had he done so, it would have been no more than they deserved.

He glanced round him for something that would suit his purpose, but, save the bedclothes, he saw nothing.

He determined to make one of the sheets available. By dint of the most terrible threats, he compelled the two abject beings to stand close to each other.

Then, stripping the clothes off the bed, he twisted the top sheet into a kind of rope, and with this he bound them tightly to each other in such a fashion that neither could move in the least.

This done, he doubled one of the blankets and put it over their heads, securing it in that position by means of the other sheet, twisted up in the same manner as the former one.

When this was done, they were, to all intents and purposes, quite helpless.

But he had not done with them yet.

They should suffer some inconvenience, he determined. By the side of the fireplace he noticed a large cupboard. "That will be the very place," he muttered. "I will stuff them in there, and then, if no one finds them, it is no fault of mine."

Before he had finished making this reflection he had begun to drag them, in spite of their resistance, along the floor.

The key was in the lock of the cupboard door, so, turning it round, he opened it.

Somewhat to his surprise, he found that there was only one shelf in it, and that very near the top.

But it was not, strictly speaking, until afterwards that this struck him.

With one vigorous push, having got them close to it, he pushed them inside.

Ere, however, he could close the door, he was startled by a rushing sound, and a dull, muffled shriek.

A heavy splash succeeded.

For a moment Blueskin was so astounded that he stood like one suddenly changed to stone.

The very instant that the two bodies reached the floor of the cupboard it gave way beneath them, and they disappeared from sight with the greatest swiftness conceivable.

It was their falling for some distance down a kind of well-like place that made the rushing noise.

The muffled shriek had come from their lips as they descended.

The heavy splash was when they reached the depths below.

It was water.

So rapidly was this done that Blueskin could scarcely bring himself to believe that it had really happened.

But it was one of those circumstances that will not for very long admit of the possibility of a doubt.

Recovering himself, he sprang to the window, and with one snatch pulled down the curtain which hung before it.

A glare of daylight of course came into the room the moment this was done, revealing its darkest recesses.

Blueskin then walked to the cupboard.

The door had swung partially shut, but he pushed it wide open.

Holding firmly by the woodwork, he looked within.

Then he saw that bottom to the cupboard there was none, and that instead there was a kind of square pit, the depth of which he could only estimate by the length of time it had taken the bodies to reach the bottom.

Bending still more over the abyss, he listened to see whether any sounds would come up from below.

But all was silent, and though he remained in the same attitude for several minutes, nothing came to indicate that the infamous lodging-house keepers were in life.

"This is very strange," Blueskin said; "very strange and very awful. I little thought that they would receive their death at my hand. But it is just, perhaps, after all. No doubt that pit is the receptacle of many a poor traveller whom they have murdered! It would probably have been my resting-place had not the steel plate I always wear prevented them from achieving their object. I must leave this place, though—I must leave this place. There is no knowing what danger I may incur by lingering here."

This was true, so he at once set about taking his departure.

Unbolting the room door, he opened it and went out upon the stairs.

But before he descended them, he listened whether any one was stirring.

But all was still.

Nevertheless he crept down the staircase with the utmost silence and caution.

They terminated in the passage.

A hasty glance showed him that it was vacant, and that the front door was standing open.

To dart out into the street was the work of a moment only, and he drew a long breath as he did so.

"Now for Jack Sheppard!" he said, as he turned his face towards the river. "Is he a prisoner, I wonder, or has he, like me, managed to escape? That is a point which I will very quickly ascertain."

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD RECEIVES A VERY IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION IN A VERY MYSTERIOUS MANNER.

WHILE the *dramatis personæ* of our story continue to be so widely separated as they now are, and as they have for some time been, it must inevitably occur that, while we are giving our attention to some, we neglect others.

But so far as possible, every one has had his turn.

The adventures of Edgeworth Bess and Colonel Thorne have been brought up to a certain point, and so too have those of Jack Sheppard and his two companions.

Blueskin also has been followed for a length of time, and now that he is not in a situation of any special danger, we feel that for a time he can be left, while a few pages are devoted to the proceedings of Jonathan Wild.

Of late he has certainly been very much neglected, but it was presumed that a greater interest was felt in those to whom he was a bane, than there was in himself.

If the reader will carry back his recollection a little, he will find that the last that was seen of him was on that morning when, after his unsuccessful pursuit of Blueskin on the Thames, he had returned to his own residence in Newgate-street, under the full impression that he should find there Jack Sheppard and the two men in whose custody he had left him.

We know already how disappointed he was in that anticipation, but we certainly shall not attempt to transcribe the awful volley of curses which poured from his lips when he was made the recipient of the startling intelligence that nothing whatever had been seen of either of them.

He could hardly believe in the possibility of such a thing at first, but, when his ire had subsided a little, he cried—"The horses—the horses! Have the horses at the door at once! Six! Call up the men! Quick, I say!"

"Yes, Mr. Wild," gasped Tonks, who was in momentary dread of receiving something from his imperious master harder to put up with than words. "Yes, Mr. Wild. In one moment, sir."

"Ya—ah! Be quick, I say."

He stalked down the passage as he spoke, and entered his office.

"Brandy," he cried. "I must have brandy. Curse that Jack Sheppard! Am I always to be thwarted by him? Is he always to slip through my fingers when I think I have got him secure. No. Jonathan Wild shall never be balked by a stripling like that. I will capture him if I live, and, when I do, I will take good care that he does not escape. I have sworn to bring him to Tyburn, as I have done many a better man, and I renew the oath. Ah!"

While speaking, Jonathan had lifted the sloping lid of his desk and took out a small black bottle of brandy, which he carried to his lips and emptied at a draught.

This done, he looked to his weapons and ammunition.

His powder-flask and shot-pouch were replenished.

He carefully loaded and primed his pistols.

Then walked back into the passage.

Here six of his janizaries had assembled, for such was the state of discipline to which he had brought them, that they obeyed with as much promptitude as soldiers.

"Ya—ah," he growled. "See all your pistols loaded, for you will have some warm work to do, I expect. Where are the horses?"

"They will be at the door in one moment, if you please, Mr. Wild."

It was Tonks who spoke, and, even as the words passed his lips, the trampling of horses was heard outside.

"There they are, sir," he said, as he flung open the front door.

"Follow me," said Wild, darting out. "Follow me."

In a disorderly throng they followed him down the steps into the street.

With what speed they could, they scrambled into their saddles.

As it happened, they were all seated before their master, for, having approached his horse in a savage mood, he had kicked it brutally on the leg because it would not stand still.

The consequence was as might naturally be expected.

The horse was not so afraid of the thief-taker as his men were, and it did not hesitate to show its resentment by kicking and plunging, and that in such a manner that

it became an impossibility for him to place his foot in the stirrup.

This did not tend to in any way abate Wild's ill temper, and the curses which he uttered were really awful to hear.

Presently, however, he spied an opportunity, and at the risk of his own neck, put his foot in the stirrup.

But he mounted in perfect safety.

No sooner, however, had he got his seat upon the creature's back, than he proceeded to vent his ill humour upon it.

With brutal recklessness, he plunged his spurs again and again into the flanks of his steed, until it uttered loud snorts of pain.

The way in which it pranced and reared would have thrown many a practised rider, but by some strange means or other, Jonathan held on.

Away they went, as though a legion of fiends was at their heels, down the Old Bailey, and on to Ludgate-hill.

With unabated speed they swept down this busy thoroughfare.

The approach to the old bridge was quickly gained.

Here he slackened a little.

The horse was completely cowed.

Looking restlessly from side to side, allowing nothing to escape his eagle glance, Jonathan went on across the bridge, for the hope that he should find his men waiting there for him still held a resting-place in his heart.

But nothing of them could he see, until, having gone some distance down the Blackfriars-road, he turned back again towards London.

Blinded as he was by rage, yet he was both puzzled and alarmed.

In no way that he could think of was he able to account for the disappearance of his two men.

The thought that they had left his service, and consented to join their fortunes to those of Jack Sheppard, never occurred to him for a moment, or, if it did, he considered it as being altogether too preposterous to be entertained.

And now from house to house he went, making the most rigid inquiries, but nowhere could he learn anything.

Thoroughly satisfied, at length, that it would be quite futile to search or inquire any further, he made his way into Fleet-street.

Here he paused, and, after a moment's thought, instead of going back to his own house, he turned his horse's head in the direction of Drury-lane.

Once before he had learned tidings there of the persons he pursued, and why should he not do so again.

It did not take him very long to reach the "Old Black Lion," and having done so, he dismounted, and commanded his followers to do so likewise.

A man who was lounging about, at a sign from him took charge of the horses.

He entered the inn, closely followed by his men.

It will be remembered that on the occasion of his former visit, he had left two of his men there to keep guard.

These, upon hearing him arrive, instantly approached him.

But they declared, in the most positive manner, that nothing had been seen, either of Sheppard or Blueskin; in fact, they were certain neither had been there.

The reader must bear in mind that this was the morning of the day upon the evening of which Jack had made a visit to the old place.

In a worse temper than ever, Jonathan turned away, and remounted his horse.

He shaped his course to Newgate-street, for his business had been rather neglected of late, for as for searching for his prey through London, no one knew better than himself the inutility of that when there was nothing to serve him as a clue.

He argued that no long time could possibly elapse before he heard something of them, and that would afford him the opportunity to act.

Besides which, he had other matters on hand. None of them perhaps so important to him as they were, but then, notwithstanding that, they required attention.

Therefore he made the best of his way back to the place from which he had started, for even now the hour was an early one, and he would be able to get back before the business of the day began.

But we fancy no one, who knew just what had taken

place that morning, would have ventured to intrude upon the thief-taker on that day at least.

Without the occurrence of anything important enough for us to record it, Newgate-street was reached.

Wild flung himself off his horse, and left it to take care of itself.

He had had a new master-key made since Jack stole the one he formerly carried, and not only that, he had had some alterations made in the locks themselves, which would make the old key quite useless.

It so happened that Tonks' turn of duty had expired.

He was succeeded by Quilt Arnold.

Jonathan rammed his key in the lock, and swung the door back with all the force he possibly could.

But Quilt, who had been for some time in his employ, was acquainted with all his little amiable tricks, so he took good care to stand aside and let the door bang harmlessly against the wall, which it did, but it made a most horrible clatter.

Jonathan did not deign to open his lips, but stalked down the hall or passage of his house like some grim old giant along the corridor of his castle.

In nine cases out of ten, when he entered his house, the first place that he went into was his office, and so he did upon the present occasion.

Passing through the half-door in the wooden railings, which divided the room into two portions, he shut it behind him, and mounted his stool.

Now he came to sit down he found how much he must have been exerting himself for he broke out all over in a profuse perspiration.

He drew out a spotted blue pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his disagreeable-looking face with it.

Then he twitched his wig violently.

Nothing vexed the great Jonathan so much as being foiled, and lately he had, in connexion with Sheppard and Blueskin, met with nothing but defeat.

His ruminations, however, were not destined to extend to any great length.

They were interrupted by a faint tap, tap upon the panel of the door.

"Who's there?" he yelled.

"Me, sir, if you please!"

It was Quilt Arnold's voice.

"Come in, then!"

Accordingly, although it was with no small degree of hesitation, the janizary opened the door.

"Well, villain," said Wild, "what is it?"

"A man, Mr. Wild, if you please, wants to see you on some very important business indeed!"

"What's his name?"

"Glucks!"

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD IS VERY UNEASY AND ALARMED ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS BOX.

"GLUCKS!" roared Jonathan Wild. "What do you mean by Glucks?"

"That is his name, Mr. Wild."

"Bah!"

"Yes, sir."

"Send him in."

"All right, sir! He's in No. 2."

Quilt Arnold vanished with these words on his lips, felicitating himself upon his good luck.

With all the speed he possibly could, he made his way across the passage to the well-known little waiting-room, which was always known as No. 2, in order to tell the man with the strange name that Jonathan Wild would see him.

It was a very strange name, and one might almost argue from it that a man with such a strange name must want to see the thief-taker upon very strange business.

But be his business what it may, and whether strange or not, we shall very quickly know.

Upon receiving the intimation from Quilt, he rose hurriedly to his feet from the seat upon which he had been sitting, and in a nervous sort of manner picked up a mysterious-looking box.

This he held tightly, as though it was something of great importance.

In length it was probably eight or nine inches, in breadth four, in depth three.



[JOHN ROOTS IS SHOT ON THE STAIRCASE BY MATTHEW FLOOD.]

"It was, sir."

"Strange!"

"Very strange!"

"Who the devil told you to say it was strange? Did you open it to see what was in it?"

"I, Mr. Wild? No, I would for ever scorn an act so base—so!"

Jonathan did not speak, but he shook his cudgel so fiercely that Mr. Glucks stopped short in his poetical flight.

"And you don't know what's inside?"

"No."

"Have you carried it safe?"

"Yes."

"I mean it hasn't hurt you at all?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Wild?"

"Mean, why how do you know what's inside it? For all you know, it might be filled with gunpowder!"

Mr. Glucks turned pale at the idea, and drew back a step.

"You don't mean to say there's gunpowder in it, Mr. Wild?"

"I don't know what there is in it, but I very soon will. Take it, and open it this minute, and tell me what's inside, or—take it—take it, I say."

"Gunpowder!" said Mr. Glucks.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD COMPELS MR. GLUCKS TO OPEN THE MYSTERIOUS BOX.

THERE was something very strange about that box.

But yet one would think there was not enough to alarm Jonathan Wild in the way that he seemed to be.

He would not touch it.

The reason was this.

It was impossible for any one in the position he occupied not to have very many enemies.

And he knew it as well as anybody.

So long as they tried openly against him he did not care.

What he feared was that an attempt would be made upon his life at a moment when he was unguarded, and by a means which would never be expected.

Now, Jonathan Wild had a vivid recollection of having once read how a very celebrated personage was once put to death by his enemies, by having a casket presented to him.

This casket, which was supposed to contain jewels of great value, was placed in his hands securely locked.

Not dreaming of any danger, the nobleman—for such he was—proceeded to open it.

No sooner, however, had he inserted the key and turned it round in the wards of the lock than, with a noise like thunder, the box exploded.

He was seated in his cabinet alone when this took place, but the attendants in his mansion heard the report, and hastened to the door of the room.

This, in order that he might not be disturbed, the unfortunate nobleman had securely fastened.

It was broken open, however, and the servants entered. They found the apartment full of dense blue smoke.

At first they could see nothing, but by degrees the vapour cleared away.

Then was presented to their view a spectacle for which they were ill prepared.

Extended upon the ground, with his head and the upper portion of his body fearfully shattered, was their master. He was quite dead.

One glance at the bleeding, palpitating mass sufficed to show that it was impossible for life to cling to it. Of the box scarcely a vestige remained.

The whole circumstance continued to be a profound mystery for many years. At length it was cleared up.

The supposititious casket of jewels was a device of his enemies in order to procure his destruction. They succeeded.

The box was filled with explosive materials, and the interior was so arranged that the turning of the key produced the same effect as pulling the trigger of a fire-arm.

To any one such a remarkable story as this would be full of interest, and the extraordinary nature of the incidents would make a deep impression upon the mind of any one.

But upon the mind of Jonathan Wild they fell with more than usual force.

From the very time that he had read this, he had had the most invincible dread of anything mysterious.

Before that, the idea that his life would be attempted to be taken in some way calculated to throw any one off their guard had dimly haunted his imagination, but afterwards that idea had taken consistency in form.

He knew how many there were to whom he was a continual curse, and he knew as well that many of them were unscrupulous enough to avail themselves of any means, however base, that presented a reasonable prospect of ridding them of him.

Naturally enough, then, when he saw this box with the tempting inscription on the lid, he, in a manner of speaking, jumped to the conclusion that some mischief or danger to him lurked within it.

So he was loath even to touch it, except with the top of his bludgeon, and that he did with very great trepidation.

It might be, of course, that the box contained nothing mischievous, but that could only be told by opening it.

This Jonathan Wild firmly determined not to do.

There were too many mysterious circumstances about it.

Not the least of them was the strange behaviour and appearance of the strange being who had brought it to him.

The manner in which he stated it had come into his possession was equally strange.

Jonathan, however, came to the conclusion, and very correctly, that Mr. Glucks was unacquainted with the contents of the box.

Had he known they were of a dangerous character, he would never have run the risk of bringing it in person.

His astonishment and alarm, too, when Jonathan had suggested that it might be dangerous to hold or open it, were too genuine to be feigned.

"Take it," Wild roared, as he perceived his visitor retreat, with the word gunpowder upon his lips. "Take it, I say! Do you hear me? You had better!"

But Mr. Glucks was too much frightened.

His nerves were of a very weak character indeed, and such a scene as this was more than he could go through.

He sank down upon the ground in a swoon.

Jonathan got off his stool.

Anger and astonishment contended fiercely in his breast.

But the former seemed to have the mastery.

At least one would have thought so, had they seen him make his way to where Mr. Glucks, in a strange, doubled-up fashion, lay upon the office floor.

Raising his ponderous foot, he dealt the unfortunate young man so terrible a kick, that it is greatly to be marvelled at that it did not demolish his slender anatomy altogether.

"Now then," growled the thief-taker, "get up, will you? Don't think to impose upon me. You are only shamming, and you know it. Get up."

He saluted him with another kick.

But though poor Mr. Glucks moved slightly, he showed no symptoms of recovering from his swoon.

"He aint shamming, then," said Wild. "Curse him, and the box and all. What shall I do with both?"

He cast a dubious and dissatisfied glance at the little box, which lay to all appearance harmlessly enough upon the slope of the desk.

"I must think a bit," said Wild, after a pause.

But he did not return to his desk.

On the contrary, he retired to that part of the room most distant from it.

Then, leaning his back against the wall, he gave himself up to reflections.

It was really ludicrous to see the doughty thief-taker so terrified at such a harmless, common-place looking thing.

But curiosity soon began to exercise its sway upon his mind.

"I'll know what's in that box," he said. "I am determined I will. Who knows? Perhaps it is nothing hurtful, but of the greatest consequence to me. But I don't think it is—I don't think it is. It must be a scheme on the part of my enemies to put me to death; but, ha! ha! they will find Jonathan Wild a match for them."

He chuckled for some few moments in that odd guttural fashion, as was usual with him when he was pleased.

"I must get rid of this fool," he muttered, as his eyes fell upon Mr. Glucks. "I must get rid of him, and then I will think how I'll get the box open. Stop! A good idea. There's Levee. Curse him! he laughed at me when he thought I was not by. I remember it. That will be a good way to serve him out. Ha! ha! Mr. Levee, I will be even with you, at least."

The reader will doubtless remember the occasion to which Jonathan alluded, and when poor Levee by his incaution had incurred the resentment of his imperious master.

It looks now as though he was about to pay dearly for his plesantry.

When Jonathan Wild the great made up his mind to do a thing he always set about it at once.

Going, then, to the door of the office, he opened it a little way, and projected his villainous-looking head into the passage.

Quilt Arnold was still upon the lock, and, fortunately for him, he was attending to his duty.

"Quilt!" yelled Wild; "Quilt!"

"Yes, sir."

"Come here; I want you."

Jonathan withdrew his head into the office again.

Quilt, of course, made all the speed he could across the passage, and into the room where his master awaited him.

He was, of course, in no small degree astonished when he saw Mr. Glucks lying to all appearance dead upon the ground.

"Carry him out," said Jonathan.

"Is he dead, Mr. Wild?"

"Dead! No, fool, he isn't; he's only swooned, or something of that sort. Carry him out and give him the watch, and let them lock him up for being drunk and disorderly."

Experience had taught Quilt Arnold the policy of implicitly obeying his master, so he at once, without a word of either question or remonstrance, took hold of Mr.

Glucks by the heels, and began to drag him out into the passage.

Jonathan looked on in grim silence.

As soon as Quilt had fairly disappeared with him, he said—

"Now for Levee! Stop a bit; I won't arouse his suspicions if I can help it. Let him fall into the snare with his eyes shut. I wonder whether I dare venture to touch the box. That fool carried it without being hurt. I'll risk it, for I should not like him to see the label; he might suspect something."

With manifest uneasiness and apprehension, Jonathan went to his desk, and reseated himself upon his stool.

There lay the box, with the inscription staring him in the face.

Then he, for the first time, noticed that the address was painted on the lid of the box itself, with white paint.

To remove it, therefore, would be difficult.

He looked at it for a moment in silence.

"Shan't touch it," he said, at length. "Too much risk. Let him make what he can of it. I'll call him!"

He raised his cudgel as he spoke, and banged it furiously upon the desk.

Quilt Arnold, who had disposed of Mr. Glucks in the manner commanded by his master, re-appeared.

"Where's Levee?"

"Up stairs, Mr. Wild."

"Call him! I want him."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Quilt vanished.

Jonathan resumed his old favourite attitude.

But his reflections, whatever they were, did not continue long, for some one tapped, in a very faint manner, upon the panel of the door.

"Come in!" roared Jonathan, at the very top of his voice. "Come in! and don't stand waiting there! I want you."

CHAPTER CXL.

THE CONTENTS OF THE MYSTERIOUS BOX PROVE TO BE VERY DIFFERENT TO WHAT JONATHAN WILD EXPECTED.

WITH a smile on his lips and a tremble in his heart, Levee sidled into Wild's office.

Since the occasion of which we spoke, he had been careful to keep as much as possible out of the way of the thief-taker, in the hopes that what he had said would be forgotten.

And now, when he entered, he half hoped that so desirable a thing had taken place.

It was the first time for some days that he had been face to face with his master.

He looked up, therefore, in a wistful sort of a manner, to see what kind of expression it wore.

But he could gather nothing from the scrutiny.

Jonathan looked much the same as usual.

That is to say—hideous in the extreme.

Twitching his wig in that peculiar way for which he was so remarkable, he said—

"Levee!"

"Yes, if you please, Mr. Wild. What did you please to want?"

Jonathan grinned.

"Take that box," he said, abruptly.

He pointed to it as he spoke.

Thinking of nothing but how he had best conciliate his master, Levee approached the desk, and stretching his arm over the railing, took the box as he had been bid.

"I am busy, Levee!" cried Wild, "and am going out."

"Yes, sir."

"I shan't be more than half-an-hour, and while I am gone, I—I——"

"What, Mr. Wild?"

"I want you to open that box."

"Certainly, Mr. Wild."

"You see the lid is fastened down, and I fancy you will have some trouble in raising it."

"I'll do it, Mr. Wild," replied Levee, elated at the good feeling Jonathan displayed towards him, and congratulating himself that the past had been forgotten.

"You had better do it in here, Levee, and take care of

the contents. Don't let any one know what you are about. I shall be back in half-an-hour."

Jonathan Wild put on his hat.

He got down off his stool.

His hideous physiognomy was distorted by a diabolical grin.

"Take care of the box, Levee, till I come back. I am only just going out into Giltspur-street. Good day, Levee Good day!"

Jonathan Wild walked out.

He closed the door behind him.

For a moment, Levee stood quite still, looking at the wood-work which hid his master from his sight.

He rubbed his head with a puzzled air.

In his anxiety to disarm suspicion, Wild had overshot the mark.

Levee suspected something more was in what had just taken place than he had seen.

"I'm blest if I can make this out," he ejaculated, rubbing his head more furiously than ever, as if by so doing he could assist his thoughts.

He still held the box in his hand.

He glanced down at it.

Then, for the first time, he noticed the writing on the lid.

Reading was an accomplishment which he possessed in only a very partial degree, and he was a long time spelling the words out.

At last he managed the first line.

"Take—this—box—immediately—to——"

The second and two following ones did not give him much trouble.

"Mr. Jonathan Wild,
Newgate-street,
London."

Then he spelt out the last, and arrived at the true sense of the whole.

"And he will reward you for your trouble."

Now this by no means served to decrease Mr. Levee's perplexity.

Indeed, it had a contrary effect.

He looked at the box with an air of the greatest possible mistrust.

"Johnny's playing some deep game," he said, at length. "I am sure of it, but what it is I cannot make out. Curse the box! What shall I do with it? I wonder now what's inside, and why he didn't open it himself."

He shook it up and down as he spoke, but no sound was produced that enabled him to form a notion of the nature of the contents.

"There's something in it, I can tell by the weight; but it don't shake about at all. Curse the box, I say. If I only knew what old Jonathan was at, I shouldn't care. What made him run out and leave me like this? I don't feel at all comfortable, that I don't. However, here goes. I'll have the lid off, and risk it, for if Jonathan was to come back before I had opened it, the house wouldn't hold him."

With these words on his lips, Levee put the box under his arm, and commenced searching his pockets.

In a minute or so, from among a multitude of other things, he produced a peculiar house-breaking implement, then very much in use, which was shaped like a long slender chisel.

This he applied to the junction of the lid with the box itself, and the crackling sound which immediately ensued, testified to the efficacy of the instrument.

Little by little, he forced away the lid, but the wood of which it was composed was hard, and it had been very securely fastened down.

But it yielded before the pressure he applied to it.

As soon as ever he was able, Levee, whose curiosity was excited to the utmost pitch, endeavoured to obtain a glimpse of the contents.

It was something white, almost like flour.

The box seemed quite filled with it, and it was pressed in hard.

More puzzled than before, Levee ripped off the remainder of the lid.

The box was harmless enough, that was quite clear, and, after all, it looked as though Jonathan's apprehensions were quite unfounded.

The contents presented a clear unbroken surface of some white granular material.

Levee looked at it for some time in silence, but the proceeding did not tend to enlighten him in the least.

The manner, however, in which he gazed at it was really most amusing to see.

"I suppose it's all right," he said; "What a fool I must be to go frightening myself about nothing. Johnny's all right. I suppose he didn't want the trouble of opening the blessed thing himself. I should like to know what it is that is in it. However, that's no concern of mine."

Little old Levee think that Wild was fully under the impression that he had laid a snare for his destruction.

When the thief-taker left his house he had carried out the intention which he had expressed of going to Giltspur-street.

Crossing over the way, he turned round the corner, and made his way to the eating-house which we have before had occasion to mention, and where Jonathan usually took his meals.

A grin of hideous satisfaction expanded his features as he gloated over the fate to which he had doomed his janizary, for somehow or another Wild felt as certain that that box was intended to be his destruction as he was of his own existence.

With great gusto he despatched a hearty meal, washed down by plentiful libations of brandy, for of late he had taken to drink a still greater quantity of this fiery stimulant.

Then his impatience rose to such a height, that he found himself unable to any longer stay away from his house and the sight which he fully expected to see there.

Rising, then, from his seat, he retraced his steps.

On reaching the door of his house, he drew forth his master key, and inserting it in the lock shot back the bolt and entered.

He fully expected to witness some scene of tumult, but the quiet appearance of the hall gave no token of anything of the kind.

All was still—unusually still—he thought.

He did not pause for more than a moment, though.

Striding across the hall, he in half-a-dozen steps reached the office door.

He listened here, but no sound whatever came from the interior.

With the feeling in his mind that he had allowed his fears to get the better of him increasing every moment, and the conviction that he had made some egregious blunder, he opened the door.

As he had more than half expected, the chamber was quite vacant; for, when Levee had opened the box in the manner we have described, and spent some time in fruitless conjecture, he had placed it upon Jonathan's desk, and betaken himself to his own quarters, there to meditate upon the mysterious conduct of his master, and endeavour to arrive at some sort of a conclusion respecting it.

Jonathan felt that he had acted in a very ridiculous manner.

No harm had resulted from the opening of the box.

Perhaps it contained something of great and secret importance.

If it did, he had, by his own groundless fears, placed that knowledge in the possession of another.

In no enviable frame of mind, he entered his office and closed the door.

The key was in the lock on the inner side, so he fastened himself in, determining not to be disturbed.

Then going up to this desk, he saw the box lying upon it, and presenting the appearance we have described.

His surprise may be imagined, and his astonishment also.

Clearly, however, the contents had not been tampered with.

He approached, and not without some misgiving, took up some of the whitish powder between his finger and thumb.

"What is it?" he asked, snappishly. "It looks like chalk pounded up. That's what it is, too, I'll be bound."

He poked about with his finger in the box, and a closer examination showed him that he was quite right in his supposition as to its character.

But what on earth could any one mean by sending a box of chalk, and taking such pains as they mani-

festly did to pack it, for had not Mr. Glucks stated that it was washed ashore by the tide, and yet the powder was perfectly dry, and free even from the least trace of dampness.

CHAPTER CXL.

JONATHAN WILD IS BOTH STARTLED AND GRATIFIED BY THE INTELLIGENCE WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS BOX CONVEYS TO HIM.

ASSUREDLY has Jonathan Wild not yet fathomed the mystery of this singular box, and such was his own impression.

But, in spite of himself, he could not banish the notion from his mind that danger lurked in it in some fashion or other.

Going through the little door in the wooden railings, by which his office was divided into two portions, he once more seated himself on the stool.

The box was then within reach of his hand.

Determining to shrink no longer from ascertaining what the inside contained, he suddenly, yet gingerly, took hold of it, and tilted it over on to its side.

Of course, when this was done, the powder ran out.

An exclamation came from Jonathan's lips.

Just peeping through the white chalky mass was a fragment of paper.

"A communication," he cried. "What a strange circumstance! What can it be, I wonder?"

He turned the box upside down as he spoke.

The powdered chalk slid down the slant of his desk.

Then there remained fully revealed to him a piece of writing paper, folded into the shape and semblance of a letter.

In the curiosity he felt to know what this letter contained, he forgot all his recent alarm, and took hold of it.

The superscription was as follows:—

Private.

MR. JONATHAN WILD.

The handwriting was of a very ordinary kind, and looked as though the person who had written it was used to having something larger in his fingers than a pen.

Jonathan slowly unfolded this epistle.

It was not secured in any way; probably the writer considered that the manner in which he had placed it in the box made it unnecessary.

When the sheet was fully outspread before him, and the first words met his eye, one of those awful roars, to which the thief-taker at times gave utterance, burst from his lips.

Then he continued reading with avidity.

We will place the document before the reader in its precise words.

It commenced thus:—

"Mr. Wild,—

"Respected Sir,—This comes from George Hawkins, and you will, I take it, be much surprised at receiving a letter from me in this fashion, but I couldn't see no other way as I could send it to you.

"Of course you will remember the suspicions which I communicated to you about Colonel Thorne, who you fancied must be a highwayman on his own account, namely, that he and Captain Howlet, the pirate, was one and the same person, which suspicion is no longer—such being the truth.

"When we parted, which was, as you know, several months ago, I said I would try to find out, by joining the pirates. Well, after a great deal of trouble, I got to be admitted a member of the band, the particulars of which, being too long, and not having no convenience for writing, I can't set down.

"I want to tell you what I know in a few words, though whether I shall be able to send you the letter is more than I can tell, having already written two, but have not been able to get out of the cave where the pirates all live, which is in the rock as: Colonel Thorne's house, called 'The Larches,' is built on.

"I have been a long while finding out which would be the best way for you to make a successful attack upon them, and at last I have found out, and you may rely

upon the information which I send you as being quite correct.

"The particular cliff which the cave is in you will be able to find easy enough, it being, as I said before, the one as the house is built on. Well, in the side of the cliff there is a kind of crack, for I can call it nothing else, which is the entrance.

"But you will have to come in a boat, and bring a ladder with you, for the way into the passage as leads to the cavern is in the top part of this crack in the cliff.

"You won't have much trouble in getting in if you once find the place, for there is only a wooden door to stop you, which you could break down at a blow.

"The pirates don't suspect at all what I am, and I have been very careful in my behaviour. They think themselves quite secure, and in no danger of detection.

"The sooner you come, Mr. Wild, and make the attack, the better, for, just at present, all the men are in the cave, and I think some little time will elapse before they set out upon another cruise. I ought not to forget to tell you that they number twenty altogether, and that they all wear masks made like an owl's head when they attack any vessel, and they certainly do look very awful when they have got them on—enough to terrify any one who is not up to their devilment.

"Howsoever, Mr. Wild, I shall have to finish this here letter, although I have got a great deal more to say; but I am afraid some of the men should catch me, and wonder what I am at. I should never have been able to write to you at all if I hadn't smuggled the things in with me to do it with, though that's neither here nor there.

"I needn't tell you what renown you will gain, Mr. Wild, if you succeed in bringing this gang to justice, for they are that daring and ferocious, that, to my certain knowledge, people are afraid to go to sea for fear they should fall into their hands.

"I trust that what I have said on the outside of the box will make any one who finds it forward it to you, for I shall have to watch my opportunity, and throw it into the water when the tide is running in. I shall have to run the risk whether it comes to you or not, but if I don't hear from you in ten days, I shall send again, and trust to being more lucky.

"Mr. Wild,

"I am your very bumble servant,
"GEORGE HAWKINS."

The reader will, of course, from what has gone before, be able to come to a tolerably correct conclusion respecting this letter.

It must be understood that Jonathan Wild made a bargain with all thieves, that if they would give him a share of their plunder, he would take care to keep them clear of the law.

But any one who would not submit to his exactions, or any one whom he found had cheated him, or made the attempt to do so, were marked out for immediate vengeance; and that vengeance consisted always in effecting the capture of the offending person, and, if they still refused to come to terms, lodging them in Newgate, preferring and substantiating a mock charge against them, and having them found guilty, and executed at Tyburn.

Rarely, indeed, did he fail in accomplishing this; and at last it grew to be quite a settled thing, if Jonathan Wild appeared against a person, that he was condemned to death.

Jonathan, to see that no one escaped his clutches, always had spies about; and from some of these he had heard the rumours and speculations which were rife concerning Colonel Thorne, who appeared in London so erratically, and who, when there, spent money in so lavish a manner.

In a moment, when he was made aware of these facts, Jonathan Wild jumped to the conclusion that this Colonel Thorne was a highwayman, and that the money he spent so freely was acquired by levying contributions upon the purses of others.

But he could bring nothing definite against him. Spies he sent out after him in abundance, but all the intelligence they could bring him was, that when he left London it was to visit an estate which he had upon the sea-shore, and which was appellationally designated "The Larches."

He learned, moreover, that, during his stay at this place, he led almost the life of a recluse, being very

rarely seen abroad, and permitting no visitors, except at long intervals, to the mansion.

He sought in vain for the knowledge he required to convert his suspicions into certainties.

One of the men who had been appointed more especially to the business of watching Colonel Thorne—by name George Hawkins—had, while at Dover, of course heard the wonderful stories related of Captain Howlet and his ferocious band.

From time to time he had picked up little scraps of information, and the result of them was the suspicion that Colonel Thorne was not a highwayman, but a pirate.

This, and the reasons he had for forming the opinion, he had communicated to Jonathan Wild, and it had been agreed upon between them that Hawkins should endeavour to join the pirate band.

This had occurred about a month previous to the commencement of this history, and by Wild (owing to the number of things he had upon his mind) had been almost if not entirely forgotten, until this letter came into his hands in the extraordinary manner we have described.

In order to make all clear, however, we must state that the letter which Hawkins had so incautiously dropped, and which had led, not only to the discovery of his treachery, but to his summary execution, was one which he had written some time back, but which he had been unable to send off.

It will be perceived by comparing the two letters (the former of which is given in the one hundred and twenty-second chapter), that though they are essentially the same, yet the one which came into Jonathan's hands contains some additional and later information which he did not seem to be in possession of when the first was written.

The roar to which Jonathan Wild gave vent when he read this letter may now be fully accounted for.

No pen or language could, however, depict the eagerness with which he perused every word of it, and when he had finished it once, he read it a second time.

This enabled him to perfectly understand it, which could hardly be said to be the case at first, for Mr. Hawkins' style of composition was rather involved.

The fame of Captain Howlet had spread itself all over the kingdom, to the terror of those engaged in maritime pursuits, but, despite of all the exertions made by the naval authorities, all attempts to capture him and his band, and bring them to justice, had failed.

Now Jonathan Wild felt that he had him in his power, and that he could crush him when he chose.

CHAPTER CXLII.

JONATHAN WILD PAYS A VISIT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE, AND THEN SETS OUT TO MAKE AN ATTACK UPON CAPTAIN HOWLET.

WITHOUT the slightest fear of contradiction, it may safely be asserted that no one was ever so impressed with the importance of promptitude of action as Jonathan Wild was.

No one had heard more about Captain Howlet and the exertions which had been made to capture him than he.

The reward, too, which had been offered for his apprehension was something over £500, but it was not that so much that tempted Wild as the personal feeling he had imbibed against the colonel, and the reputation as an indefatigable officer he should acquire by capturing him and his much-dreaded band.

It was only by occasionally having recourse to such artifices as this, that he succeeded in blinding the eyes of the public and the authorities to his real proceedings.

Knowing their value, therefore, he was always on the look out for the securement of such offenders as were of least value to him, and whose apprehension would redound most to his credit.

On this occasion he had a double stimulus for instantaneous exertion.

Hawkins had stated that all the crew were then in the cavern, but that he knew not when they would set out on a cruise.

The advantage of capturing them on land, and much in the manner of mice in a trap, was obvious, and although Jonathan had much important business on hand, he resolved to cast it all aside, and devote himself to this.

Jack Sheppard, he considered, he could make sure of at any time he wished.

Blueskin the same.

The one about whom he was most anxious was Edgworth Bess.

He could not imagine where she had betaken herself, or into whose hands she had fallen.

Little did he think they were those of Colonel Thorne.

Little did he think that by apparently neglecting his own interests, he should be forwarding them to the utmost.

But so it is with vain predestinated human beings, unable to see that which is of most importance to them, and frequently groping darkly in the opposite direction to that which they should have taken.

The grand aim of Jonathan's life now was, by one bold stroke, to secure at the same time both wealth and revenge, the two things human beings most toil after, and most of whom are satisfied with the gratification of one.

Wild was growing tired of the life he was, and had been for so many years, leading.

Not only that, but so far he had trod upon dangerous ground with perfect safety.

How much longer he would continue to do so was more than he or any one else could precisely calculate.

Up to the present time he had made himself a kind of reputation, and his dark deeds were only known to few.

He was exceedingly desirous not to outlive this reputation, dubious as it may be deemed.

Lord Donmull—who, at his suggestion, had sought oblivion of remorse in change of scene—he considered to be utterly in his power.

He held the broad acres and treasures of the Donmulls, of which he had so unjustly taken possession, at his good will only.

Whenever it should suit him, nothing would be easier than to oust him from them.

But he did not want to do this until he could step into them himself.

Yes, this was the bold and audacious scheme which the notorious thief-taker had conceived, and resolved to carry out.

The means he thought were easy.

Many would have deemed them difficult.

More considered them insuperable.

Edgworth Bess was unquestionably the rightful heir.

There would be little or no difficulty in proving her identity.

He believed that he could even compel Lord Donmull to acknowledge her.

Should he do so, that would be sufficient.

What further proof could be demanded or required?

Surely none.

All, therefore, that remained for him to do was to get Edgworth Bess into his sole possession.

* Then, either by threats or persuasions, cause her to become his wife.

The latter would be the most preferable and comfortable course, could it be accomplished.

But there was the difficulty.

Edgworth Bess was determined.

She was not one to be easily intimidated into any course, if she saw she was going against her own interests and inclination.

A woman, however, Jonathan considered he was more than a match for.

All he wanted was to obtain a husband's right over her.

Then she could go where and do what she pleased.

She was not in her person the object which he sought.

It was her inheritance and riches.

A consideration of these briefly-enumerated circumstances will at once have the effect of convincing the reader that Jonathan's primary object must be to get possession of the poor girl.

Now, with an exercise of that cunning for which he was so remarkable, he had calculated that the quickest manner in which he could find and regain possession of Edgworth Bess would be to release Jack Sheppard from custody, and send some one to follow him, and bring back word where he had met the girl.

We have seen how that little enterprise, cunning as it was, essentially failed for two reasons.

One was that Wilkinson did his duty of spy so badly that Jack detected him.

The other was that Jack had no idea where to find himself.

Since that time, then, Jonathan, although occupied with so many things that demanded immediate attention, had never lost sight, mentally, of Edgworth Bess.

Nor was it likely he should do so, when we consider the boldness of the step he meditated.

He had sent out men in every direction—men upon whom he could rely—to look out for her, but as yet none of them had gathered any intelligence.

But while this was going on, he must not suffer his own interests and fame to be neglected.

As in some great display of fireworks, the grandest effort of pyrotechnic skill is reserved to the last, so did Jonathan wish to accomplish some mighty deed before he carried out his intention of retiring from public life.

The apprehension and annihilation of Captain Howlet and his band, he thought, would be the most striking act he could perform, and he determined it should be the closing one of his life.

Crumpling up the unfortunate letter he had received in so extraordinary a manner, Jonathan put on his hat and left the office.

He stopped in the hall.

"Quilt!" he yelled, "Quilt!" for, since the defection of Blueskin, that worthy had been inducted into the duties of lieutenant in the thief-taker's household and affairs.

"Yes, Mr. Wild. Here I am, sir."

"Send some one for a hackney-coach."

"Yes, sir. Shall I open the door? An empty one will be sure to pass the door in a moment."

"No, send some one."

"Very good, sir."

"And, Quilt."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"I am going out upon a long expedition, and I want to leave you in charge of the house."

"Yes, sir. Oh! yes, sir."

"Shut up! I shall want all the men I have got, and about a dozen extra hands; there will be a good reward to share amongst them."

"When must they be ready, Mr. Wild?"

"In two hours at the latest. I shall be back by then, and as soon as I return they must start."

"I'll see to all being ready by that time, Mr. Wild."

"Get on, then, and call a hackney-coach. Stop, all the men must be mounted on good strong horses."

"I know, sir."

"Fetch the coach, then."

Having given these orders to his subordinate, Jonathan made his way to the upper portion of his mansion, where he bestowed some little pains and attention upon his toilette.

By the time he had finished, the hackney-coach was at the door.

"Where to, Mr. Wild?" asked the driver, as soon as Jonathan made his appearance. "Where to, sir?"

"Secretary of State's!" growled the thief-taker.

As he spoke the words, he entered the cumbrous, crazy vehicle, the door of which was officiously held open by Quilt, and as officiously closed after him when he had taken his seat.

The driver flogged his tottering cattle, and at a snuffing sort of trot they took their way down Newgate-street into the Old Bailey.

The interval occupied by the journey Wild employed in maturing his plans.

What they were will be best seen when he puts them into execution.

The office of the Secretary of State was at last reached, and Jonathan alighted.

The mere mention of his name was sufficient to procure him an interview with that high official personage.

To him Wild briefly recounted the intelligence which had come into his possession, and then asked for assistance.

"So complete is my information," said Wild, "that I hold him powerless within my grasp, and I shall capture him and the whole of his atrocious band without difficulty."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Wild."

"I try to do my duty as an officer and a faithful subject," replied the thief-taker, hypocritically, "and it de-

lights me to find that my efforts are so highly appreciated by so discriminating a person as yourself."

Jonathan bowed deeply as he uttered these ambiguous compliments.

"I find," said the Secretary, after referring to memoranda before him, that the rewards offered for the capture or destruction of this formidable pirate and his band are very considerable. In addition to the five hundred pounds offered by the government, I find there are rewards offered by private persons, the aggregate amount of which is three hundred pounds; so if you succeed, it will be a good thing for you, Mr. Wild."

"It is not so much the reward," said Wild, as he prepared to take his departure, "for that will be equally divided among the men; but I desire to be of benefit to the community at large. Good day, my lord; I have your full permission to take whatever steps I may consider best suited to accomplish the end in view."

"You have, Mr. Wild," replied the Secretary.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

JONATHAN WILD REACHES THE ENTRANCE TO THE PIRATES' CAVERN IN THE CLIFF.

UPON leaving the Secretary of State, Jonathan Wild made the best of his way to Newgate-street.

When he arrived, although the time he had been absent was considerably under two hours, he found the men waiting for him.

This, in combination with his success with the Secretary, put him into good humour.

There were thirty men at least, all powerful, well-armed fellows, and mounted upon strong, serviceable steeds, which, while they could endure a vast amount of fatigue, yet would get over the ground at a very creditable rate.

One was waiting for Jonathan himself.

But before he mounted, he ran into his house, and hooked to his side a huge hanger, the largest size, indeed, ever manufactured, and stuffed his pockets with pistols.

Nor did he omit to take with him a plentiful supply of ammunition.

His hat, too, he threw off, and substituted another, which was curiously and cleverly supported with bands of iron, which combined all the advantages a helmet could have, without the inconvenience of the great weight.

As he sallied forth from his house, thus fully armed and accoutred, he looked a very formidable individual indeed.

Vaulting into the saddle with greater agility than any one, seeing his bulky and unwieldy form, could have imagined, he gave the orders for his men to follow.

With something like a feeling of exultation at his heart, and pride to see himself at the head of so large and so well-armed a troop, Jonathan trotted off.

It was the dinner hour, and the streets were thronged with foot passengers, who turned to gaze after the thief-taker and his troop with something akin to admiration.

But curiosity was the most predominant feeling, for at that time Jonathan Wild's face was as well known as the dome of St. Paul's is to-day.

They guessed in a moment that it was an enterprise of more than an every day character which took him abroad with so strong a body guard, and many ran along upon the footpaths to see which way he was going.

But none exactly suspected his destination, or else the popular excitement would have been immense.

Soon, then, he distanced all of these, and gained the broad and well-kept Dover-road, then a much busier thoroughfare than it is at the present time, when the railway conveys persons to the town, through which it passes, and likewise to the continent.

But when Jonathan lived, the most rapid mode of transit was by means of a post-chaise; and in general the journey was performed by stage-coaches.

So, as he went, he attracted a good deal of attention.

To relate minutely their progress from London to Dover would be uninteresting, since nothing of an unusual character occurred to diversify it.

Midnight had passed when they arrived.

They had made very few halts on the way, and the men were horribly fatigued.

As for the horses, they were completely knocked up; and had Dover been a couple of miles further, they would never have reached it.

Certainly Jonathan himself could not help feeling tired, as the rest did; but the hard riding did not take so much effect upon his iron frame as it did upon some of his followers.

He allowed them but a short interval for rest and refreshment.

In the mean time he made his way to the sea-shore, and hired two large eight-oared boats, which would conveniently contain himself and his men.

From this it will be seen that he contemplated making his attack upon the pirates that very night—or rather morning.

And he just saved himself by so doing.

When he had completed this business of hiring the boats, and given particular instructions for their being in readiness at the time he required, he made his way back to the inn where he had lodged his men.

This was the only rest they got.

He instructed them all to look to their weapons, and set them the example of so doing.

This done, he marshalled them down to the sea-beach at once.

The boats were there in readiness.

It was not until this moment that Wild remembered what Hawkins had said about the necessity of bringing a ladder with him.

But it was not too late to repair the omission, so he immediately sent off four of his men to borrow two in the king's name.

While they were gone, he occupied the time by placing the other men in the boats, and giving them more detailed instructions as to what they were severally to do when they reached their destination.

He had not to wait long after he had finished his instructions for the return of the men he had sent for the ladders.

They had succeeded in obtaining two, which were long and strong, and admirably adapted for the purpose for which they were intended.

One was placed in each boat, and then the order was given to push off.

This was done.

Jonathan, with a night-glass in his hand, stood at the prow of the foremost boat, directing them which course they were to take.

The men in the boat, however, knew perfectly well which was the cliff Jonathan meant when he told them it was the one upon which the residence of Colonel Thorne was situated.

The distance they had to go was not very great, but owing to the swell of the tide it took them rather a long time to reach it.

They did not dare to hug the land too close, for fear they should be dashed upon the rocks, to which they were close.

"That is the cliff, sir," said the man in the boat, who seemed to be in some kind of command over his companions.

"Row towards it, then," cried Wild, as he again carried the telescope to his eye, in the hope that he should be able to distinguish the "crack" of which Hawkins had spoken.

But they had gone too far out from the land for it to be visible in the darkness.

Their course, however, was now direct for the cliff.

With feverish impatience, which every moment deepened in intensity, Wild looked out for the fissure.

He was, to a certain extent, in doubt whether the information which had been forwarded to him was correct.

But upon the reader's mind there can be no such doubt.

Already they know how Hawkins, by a slight carelessness, had been discovered, and how promptly his treachery had been punished.

His life had paid the penalty.

Of all this, it must not be forgotten, Jonathan was perfect ignorance, as well as of the presence of Edgewood in the cavern.



[JONATHAN WILD REACHES NEWGATE-STREET IN SAFETY WITH HIS PRISONER.]

would not for a moment have shrunk from the perpetration of such a crime.

All he intended or desired was to be revenged upon him in such a way as should bring about his ruin.

With a warped judgment, he argued that his master had ruined his life, and, therefore, it was no more than fair that he should do the same thing for him.

As, however, with cautious and silent tread, he stole across the room, something of a better feeling came over his heart.

He felt that, could he have retreated, he would have done so, leaving his purpose unachieved.

But that was not to be thought of.

The men he had with him effectually put an end to the idea.

That, during the brief interval it took him to cross the room, Jack knew to the full, the meaning of repentance, cannot be denied.

But he shook off the feeling.

Nerving himself to carry out the desperate enterprise

he had undertaken, and banishing from his mind all promptings of good, he paused by the bedside of his master.

It was a large old-fashioned bedstead, and entirely surrounded by thick curtains, so that no glimpse of the bed itself, or of its occupants could be obtained.

But the regular breathing of some person in deep slumber could be distinctly heard.

Jack made a sign with his hand to his two companions, which they immediately understood.

They sank down upon their knees, and raised the valance round the bed.

Jack had already informed them that the box containing the money was to be found there.

They crept under, therefore, in quest of it.

Nor were they disappointed in their search.

Soon they encountered something large and cold, which a touch told them was what they sought.

Gradually they applied a little pressure to it, forcing it along the floor.

The weight was enormous, and they moved it with great difficulty.

They could not avoid, too, despite the great care they took, an occasional creak, or grating sound, as they pushed it over the boards.

When this happened, they stopped and began again with greater caution than before.

A great deal of time was consumed thus, but it was unavoidable. Haste would have produced noise—and noise, detection.

At length, however, by pushing it inch by inch, they got to the edge of the bed.

As is common in many sleeping apartments, there was a strip of carpet all round the bed, and when they succeeded in getting the box upon that they were more at ease.

While this was taking place, Jack Sheppard stood at the head of the bed.

In his hand was a pistol.

He held it in an attitude to do immediate execution, in case any alarm should be given.

But the old carpenter slept soundly. He was stout and of a somnolent disposition.

They might almost have made thrice the noise they did without fearing that it would disturb him.

When the box was fairly clear of the bed, it could be seen that it was made of some dark-coloured wood, and heavily banded with iron.

The days for such things are over now. They are only to be seen at the old curiosity shops occasionally. As the iron safe came into use, so did they grow obsolete.

The former now is universally used as the depository of valuable property of all kinds, and to such a degree of perfection has their manufacture been carried, that not only is all attempt at opening one made impossible, but also by their peculiar construction they are capable of preserving documents uninjured, even though exposed to the fiercest heat.

The box was not of any great dimensions, though it was weighty.

It had every appearance of being secure.

To have tried to open it there would, the housebreakers thought, be incurring too much risk, so mustering all their strength, Flood and Blewitt lifted it up by the ends, and staggered out on to the landing with it.

They placed it down silently at the head of the stairs.

Jack now felt that he could leave his post.

Accordingly he followed his comrades from the room.

The door he closed after him, in order to prevent, as much as possible, the transmission of any sound which might be made by opening the box.

The candle now rendered them effectual assistance.

Blewitt stooped down, and made a thorough but rapid examination of the mauer in which the box was fastened.

At the end of his scrutiny he gave a nod, which seemed to imply that he should be able to manage it.

He again had recourse to the bunch of skeleton keys, which had already been of such assistance to him, in opening the door of the bed room.

In addition to the keys, there were upon the ring a variety of small, bright, curiously-shaped implements.

They all differed materially from one another in some way.

These were picklocks.

In the hands of a skilful man, and one accustomed to their use, they were formidable instruments, and such as a great deal might be accomplished with.

Carefully selecting one of the picklocks, Blewitt commenced an attack upon the lock of the box with it.

Using no force whatever, but just gently moving it about, he, after a great deal of trouble, managed to get the lock back.

But, upon trial, the lid was found to be as secure as ever.

It would not move in the least.

There were no other locks visible either.

Jack could give no explanation.

What was the meaning of this for a moment baffled all.

Then the thought occurred to Blewitt that the chest might have been double locked, and that he had only shot the bolt back half the distance.

CHAPTER CXLV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND HIS COMPANIONS EMPTY THE STRONG BOX, BUT DO NOT SUCCEED IN GETTING OFF WITH THEIR BOOTY.

To immediately set about ascertaining whether this was the reason the lid of the chest could not be raised, was Blewitt's first impulse.

He again introduced the pick into the lock, and was rewarded by hearing a second snap, like the first, but rather louder.

Impatiently, for he was alarmed at so much delay, Jack took hold of the lid.

This time it came up readily enough.

All looked eagerly for the contents, but they were hidden from view by a covering of some kind of skin.

This, however, was quickly thrown off, and underneath it appeared a variety of valuable articles.

But the chest, which was about half full, contained chiefly a number of small bags, very carefully tied up.

That they contained coin was apparent at a glance.

The peculiar shape, and, in some places, the round edges of the money projecting through the canvas, made it impossible for them to be mistaken.

"Now," whispered Jack, "never mind anything but the bags. All contain money—some gold, and some silver! Fill your pockets with them, and let us be off. We have been here sadly too long already."

The two men made no reply to this speech, save at once doing their leader's bidding.

The bags disappeared one after another with extraordinary rapidity.

Jack himself took a share.

All three wore those coats which form so characteristic a portion of the costume of the period.

They were made with large skirts and enormous pockets, the capaciousness of which seemed to have no limit.

Now those in particular which Flood and Blewitt had on were made with an especial view to transporting a multitude of objects.

Between them, they were able to empty the box of every bag which it contained.

All that was left were some antique pieces of silver of no great intrinsic value, and which, in consequence, it was not worth while to encumber themselves with.

Specie, too, could not be identified, and these articles would leave a trace which, followed up, might lead to their detection.

"Now," said Jack, in a low whisper, when the last bag of money had been removed, "let us be off; we have been safe so far, and do not let us go into any danger needlessly."

"All right, Jack," said Flood; "but stop a moment."

"What for?"

"Didn't you say the old man was your governor?"

"I will tell you that history another time."

"All right; that is not what I meant."

"Go on, then."

"Stop, now, and hear what I have to say. There's no harm in that."

"Perhaps not; only we are losing precious moments."

"Pho, pho! that's all right enough."

"But what do you want?"

"Didn't he treat you very badly?"

"Who?"

"The old man."

"John Roots?"

"Yes."

"He did ill-treat me; he forced me away from this house, where otherwise I should have been at this moment. But my father swung at Tyburn through Jonathan Wild's devilry, and he always flung it in my face, until at last I got almost mad."

Jack spoke rapidly.

He spoke, too, excitedly, and, in the oblivion of the moment, raised his voice louder than was prudent.

But the circumstance was unnoticed by him.

"I thought that was it," said Flood.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! nothing; only"—

"Only what?"

"Why, if any one had served me as John Roots has served you"—

"What?"
 "I shouldn't have taken it so easy as, you have, that's all."

"How have I taken it?"

"Why, easy."

"If I have, I have made up for it now. He is a beggar. I shall ruin him—ruin him, even as he has ruined me."

"That remains to be seen, Jack. We have got a good swag, that's certain."

"We have, and, therefore, let us get off with it in safety."

"Where's the danger? If there had been any, we should have found it before now."

"Do not be too confident, Flood. Follow me. You are too much elated at our success, and you forget the absolute necessity there is for caution."

"No, I don't; but if you go away from here without settling the old man, I shall consider the job as only half done."

"Would you have me murder him as he sleeps?" asked Jack, in a tone of horror. "No! bad I may be, but I am not bad enough for that."

"Well, as you like; but I tell you, if anybody served me so, I should not sleep while he lived."

"No," said Jack. "Let us depart. I am satisfied with what I have done, and such being the case, surely you ought to be."

"Oh! I am satisfied, Jack; but don't you be chicken-hearted. You are a brave, likely young fellow, and I say, death to the man that's against you!"

"Enough, enough, Flood. Descend, descend."

But Matthew Flood stood obstinately at the top of the staircase, and Jack was afraid to make any attempt to pass him, lest a struggle should ensue, and an alarm be raised.

"Look here, Jack. I say, death to the man that's against you!"

"You are mad!"

"Not a bit of it."

"But you are."

"I say I ain't, and not only that, if you don't like the idea of stopping the old man's breath yourself, I'll do it for you!"

"No—no," said Jack, "I don't desire his death. I tell you I am already satisfied. Descend, I say, and let us make the best of our way from the spot, for I have no desire to be recognised."

"Oh! well—well! Have your own way. But if you go away and leave the job as it is, I shan't think half so well of you as what I have done."

"That I cannot help," said Jack, firmly, for his patience was almost exhausted. "But I have never committed murder yet, and I shall try to keep my hands free from the crime!"

"Pish!"

"Descend! Descend, I say, and do not by your folly imperil us any longer. I tell you I will not take John Roots' life, nor will I suffer you to take it, until you have taken mine first."

"Oh! very well—very well! If that's your game, I give in at once. Come on!"

So saying, Flood began to descend the stairs.

Jack Sheppard and Blewitt, who had kept perfectly silent during the rapid conversation which had taken place, followed.

He had not taken the part of either, for he every moment expected that an open quarrel would result.

He knew, from former experience, the obstinate nature of Flood's disposition.

He knew that when he once took an idea into his head, there was the greatest conceivable difficulty in turning him.

But on this occasion, though it was most reluctantly, he had given way.

Bitterly indeed did he live to repent his folly.

The moments that they spent in this profitless discourse upon the landing, should have been used in getting clear of the premises.

The conversation had been carried on rapidly, and it had taken up but a very small quantity of time indeed; but then a moment is enough to decide the destinies of nations.

More than once during the brief dispute, the voices of

both parties had risen to a higher tone than was consonant with safety.

And once, when Jack spoke so excitedly, the familiar sounds had penetrated the chamber of John Roots.

He woke.

He heard the murmuring of voices.

The idea of thieves at once entered his mind.

But he was, for a moment or two, too frightened to move hand or foot.

Then he recovered himself.

He sprang out of bed.

The voices had ceased.

The interior of the room, from so long having been an inmate of it, was very familiar to him, and, therefore, he was able, without trouble or delay, to make his way to the door.

He tried it.

To his horror, it was unlocked!

Dreading the worst, and driven almost mad by the idea that his house had been broken into, he, without a thought of what danger he might be incurring, flung the door open, and dashed out upon the landing.

The candle on the balusters was still burning.

It showed him his box—the precious chest in which his whole worldly wealth was deposited—lying open at his feet, and despoiled of its most valuable contents.

A shout—an irrepressible shout—came from his lips when he saw it.

He fancied he heard a noise upon the stairs.

Still heedless of his danger, and thinking only of the frightful and irreparable loss he had sustained, urged on by a wild and insane hope of getting some portion of it back again, he began to descend.

When he reached the angle where the stairs formed a kind of supplemental landing-place, he caught sight of three figures.

The moment he did so, he shouted at the top of his voice—

"Murder! thieves! Help, help! Thieves! murder!"

Police! Help! he!"

The word was arrested on his lips.

There was a bright flash and a report, succeeded by a groan.

Flood had fired.

He hit his mark, too, for the carpenter fell headlong down the remainder of the staircase.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF BLUESKIN'S PROCEEDINGS AFTER HIS ESCAPE FROM THE MURDER DEN ON THE RIVER SIDE.

THAT necessity, which the proverb says knows no law, compels us most reluctantly to leave Jack Sheppard in his present very perilous situation, while we relate some other events which were occurring at the same time, and with which the reader must be made acquainted without delay.

When Blueskin had the good luck to escape with his life from the horrible den he had so unwittingly entered, he had turned his face towards the river, with the expressed determination of finding out Jack Sheppard.

He turned towards the river for that purpose.

But ere he had got very far, the deadly sensation of weakness, which excitement had enabled him to overcome, now forced itself upon him.

His brain reeled.

His feet gave way beneath him, and he would have sunk to the ground had he not supported himself by clinging against the angle of a building.

Here he steadied himself, and to some extent recovered the use of his faculties.

The reader will remember that he had received a rather ghastly sort of wound from Wild's pistol when he rose to the surface of the Thames, near the buttress of Blackfriars-bridge.

This had bled profusely, though, of course, the cold water in which he had been so long immersed checked it to a great extent.

Still, the quantity of blood he had lost was enough to reduce any one to the utmost stage of exhaustion, without taking into account the immense exertion he had been compelled to make.

Indeed, when he sought shelter in the murder den, it

will be recollected that he was just conscious he was doing something, and that was all.

The rest he had had, though brief, had in a considerable degree recuperated him, and so, when the cowardly attempt to murder him was made, he was endowed with a return of his former strength.

But it was evanescent, lasting only long enough for him to secure his safety, and then departing, leaving him weaker than before.

It was now getting into the busy part of the day, and many who passed by—for the streets were thronging with people—looked upon him with curiosity, but nothing more.

It is ever so in London. Those who walk much about its myriad streets must have noticed so obtrusive a fact, and a hundred and fifty years ago, when Blueskin lived, it was just the same.

When they saw the dirty and bedraggled condition he was in, and saw his apparel stained in many places with blood, those who had felt an inclination to help him turned away, leaving him to his fate—to live or perish as he chose.

In a little while, however, thanks to the vigorous constitution he possessed, Blueskin got so far better as to be able to stand without holding by the wall.

Then, in a devious, tottering fashion, he made his way down the street.

What the name of it was he had no idea, but after proceeding a few steps, he found it led into a wider and busier thoroughfare.

Sad indeed would have been his fate had he at that moment encountered his arch enemy, Jonathan Wild.

The thief-taker would not have scrupled to take his life, defenceless as he was, for he wished above all things to be rid of him.

Blueskin staggered on.

The people gave way, right and left, before him, allowing him a clear passage.

Suddenly there passed across Blueskin's imperfect vision the bottles of variegated hues which adorn the windows of chemists' shops.

The thought struck him that he would enter here, and get his hurts properly washed and dressed.

Money he had in his pockets in plenty, and he knew well enough that the mere sight of it would procure him every attention.

He entered the shop.

A boy of a very diminutive species, and with a look of precocious intelligence upon his countenance which was really painful to witness, stood behind the counter.

He looked rather alarmed when he saw Blueskin come in, though he was accustomed to have visits from rather rough-looking customers.

But Blueskin was in a terrible plight, and his appearance was ghastly in the extreme.

In a spasmodic sort of way the boy managed to gasp out—

"Shop!"

In reply to this call, there came into the shop, from a very dirty parlour behind it, a stout, middle-aged man, whose countenance wore a pleasing expression of kindness.

As well as he could, Blueskin, in reply to his inquiries, made him aware of what he required.

He accompanied it with the promise of paying well for what was done.

Accordingly, the chemist led Blueskin into the little dingy parlour which we have incidentally mentioned, and there proceeded to make an examination of the nature of his hurts.

But until he called for a basin of hot water and a sponge, and cleared the coagulated blood from the orifice of the wound, he could not tell much about them.

Then was revealed a long gash or furrow in his shoulder which the bullet had made.

Fortunately, when it struck him it did not lodge anywhere, but just encountering the shoulder-bone, glanced off it, and ploughed up the flesh several inches in the direction of his neck.

This, while it looked a formidable affair, really was not so, but the chemist said—

"Really, my dear sir, you are in a very bad state indeed. I am sure I don't know what I shall do for you. You require to have your wounds carefully dressed in the

first place, and then rest and strengthening medicines in the second."

"The first I may have," replied Blueskin, "but the second is quite out of the question. Dress my wounds as well as you are able."

Thus commanded, the chemist set about his rather unpleasant task.

We must do him the justice to say that he performed it in a very creditable manner.

When he had finished, Blueskin was quite overcome.

Perceiving it, the chemist gave him permission to stay where he was for a few hours.

Of this Blueskin took immediate advantage, thanking him as he did so.

A few hours' quiet rest, and a couple of doses of medicine, which the chemist mixed up, as well as some strengthening food, made a most wonderful difference.

By dusk he was quite another man.

Unquestionably it would have been best for him to have persevered in his present course of treatment, but his impatience to know Jack's fate, and that also of his master's child, Edgworth Bess, made it impossible for him to do so.

Giving the chemist five guineas for his trouble and attention, he left the shop.

Upon going outside, he found himself in Union-street, Southwark.

He knew, of course, in a moment, which way to take, now that his head and mind were clear.

He directed his steps to London-bridge, intending to get that way to Newgate-street, and make some inquiries there.

He looked out for a hackney-coach for some time, but unsuccessfully.

But he walked on until he reached the Borough, where he made sure he should see one pass.

As it so happened, however, not one was in sight.

While standing and looking, he was startled by a voice at his elbow.

"Any cloesh, sir?—any cloesh? Here's shome that will just shut you. Very sheap, too. Valk in, sir. Valk in."

Blueskin turned round before half this speech, which was spoken with extreme volubility, was uttered, and saw standing near him, in a deferential attitude, an old Jew clothes' salesman.

A flaring oil-lamp from the shop, which was the corner one, sent a flickering light upon the pavement, and by the aid of this, Blueskin looked down at his apparel, and perceiving the shocking condition he was in, did not hesitate to accept the man's proposal.

From a large assortment he selected a suit of clothes, such as he considered would best suit him.

These were quite of an ordinary kind, and such as would be worn by almost any one in the middle rank of life.

He changed his own for these, and paid the difference.

He made some improvements in his toilet, and gave himself a good washing, so that when he emerged from the clothier's he looked quite a reputable character.

There was only one thing he now required to complete the metamorphosis, and that was the services of a barber.

In London one has not far to go to find one of these shops, so without hesitation he went into the first to which he came.

In addition to being shaved—and in this latter operation he had all vestige of beard, mustache, and whisker removed from his face—he had his hair cut.

Scarcely any one would have believed that a few simple changes like these would have made the difference they did.

He now looked a gentleman.

Leaving the barber's shop, he walked to the kerbstone, and stood there waiting for a hackney-coach to pass him.

While so engaged, a ragged, shrunken, and emaciated object crawled up to him.

"Want a coach, your honour?" he said. "Let me fetch one for you. God bless your honour! I am starving!"

Something in the tone of this man's voice struck Blueskin as being familiar.

Where he had heard them before he could not think for a moment, but all at once he recollected.

With a fierce cry upon his lips, he sprang forward and grasped the poor miserable-looking being by the throat.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

BLUESKIN PLAYS THE PART OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN, AND IS REWARDED FOR SO DOING.

It was Steggs!

That miserable being, who had first of all brought upon poor Edgworth Bess so much woe and persecution.

One glance made Blueskin quite sure of his identity.

But since he saw him last a great change in his appearance had taken place.

Does the reader recollect that last occasion?

It is not actually so far back in time, but during that interval a multitude of incidents had taken place.

For this reason it may have been forgotten.

The last time, then, that Blueskin saw him was when, after his recovery at the abbey ruins from the wound Jonathan had given him, he had disguised himself, and in the most daring manner possible forced a way into Jonathan Wild's house.

He did this because he was impressed with the idea that in the cells, the situation of which, beneath the thief-taker's abode, he knew so well, he should find Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess.

As we have shown, he arrived there just a little too late.

Both those whom he sought had been there, but, by a strange concatenation of events, had been set free.

But on opening the cell doors in his fruitless search, he came to the one in which Jonathan had incarcerated Steggs.

That individual came forth.

He was then in a frightful state of emaciation, for the thief-taker never troubled himself much about supplying his prisoners with the necessaries of life.

Well disguised as Blueskin was upon that occasion, Steggs did not, of course, recognise him.

But Blueskin knew him, and an angry feeling welled up in his mind, but he stifled his resentment, for he felt that that was anything but a fitting time for its display.

How Blueskin and Steggs and the other prisoner, whom the former had released from the cells, succeeded in effecting their escape from Wild's house, has already been related to the reader.

On reaching the street, Blueskin had forcibly requested them to separate, and all three had taken different roads.

But from that moment, we have not heard a word respecting Steggs's proceedings.

Blueskin felt a deep-seated animosity against this man.

Was he not an enemy to his master's child?

And so, from the sudden impulse of the moment, when he heard his voice and knew him, he had seized him round the throat with a vice-like grasp.

He relaxed his hold, however, for he did not wish to crush out what life there was in him, and that, to judge by his looks, was very little.

He was in hopes he should be able to extract some information from him respecting those he sought.

Changed, as he was, Steggs did not know Blueskin, and the sudden attack had taken him completely by surprise.

He gasped for breath.

That he was really starving with hunger, the exhausted state of his body fully proved.

"Speak!" said Blueskin, sternly, drawing him aside into the shadow of the houses as he spoke. "Speak, and beware how you trifle with me, or give me a false reply. Speak, I say."

Steggs made a violent effort.

It was plain he wished to answer his interrogator, but it was beyond him.

He tried and failed.

Blueskin noted this.

He saw and felt certain that he was upon the very brink of the grave, and that unless some assistance was promptly rendered him, he would assuredly perish.

Much as he detested the man, and little as he felt inclined to do him a service, still Blueskin was certain that if he wished to obtain any information from him, he must succour him.

"Come," he said, "cheer up! Cross over the road with me to yonder public-house, and you shall have something to eat and drink."

Could Steggs, by any possibility, have commanded his voice to thank them for this offer, he would have done so.

His lips moved convulsively, but gave utterance to no sound.

He made, however, a step forward in advance.

Blueskin took him by the arm, and led him into a public-house nearly opposite the spot upon which they had been standing.

The room was almost deserted, and only partially lighted up, but there was a fire burning in the grate, which diffused both light and warmth.

"What will you have?" asked Blueskin. "Speak freely. You shall have what you desire if you will answer what questions I choose to ask you."

Steggs nodded.

Then, after a violent struggle, he said, in a faint and almost inaudible whisper—

"Brandy."

This, under the circumstances, was not the wisest thing he could have, but Blueskin was not over-solicitous about him, so long as he could give him the information for which he panted.

Accordingly he ordered two glasses of brandy.

No sooner was the fiery beverage set down before Steggs than, with a trembling hand, he grasped the glass and carried it to his lips.

He did not remove it from them until the glass was empty.

Then he fell back upon the seat like one dead.

He recovered himself, however, and, leaning forward so as to rest himself upon the table, he looked Blueskin in the face.

By the look of his countenance, it could be perceived that he possessed some faint recollection of him.

Blueskin watched him in silence for some few moments, and then, as the poor wretch seemed to have regained the use of his faculties, he said—

"Now speak."

"What do you wish to know?" asked Steggs, feebly.

"Who are you?"

"Do not question me," said Blueskin, "but reply at once to what I say."

"I will."

"Beware how you speak falsely."

"I will, kind sir."

"I give you warning, that if you do, you will pay dearly for it."

"But who are you?" asked Steggs again, who, as the brandy began to exert itself upon him, assumed his natural caution.

"That does not matter. I am one whom you have done enough to make a bitter enemy of, but if you will serve me truly, I will forget the past, and make you my friend."

"The past," moaned Steggs. "The past! the past! Would I could recall it. Would I had had the power of looking into the future, how differently I should have acted!"

"Are you sure of that?" asked Blueskin, eagerly.

"Why should you doubt me? Two paths lay open to me. I chose one. Look to what it has brought me."

"I do not understand you, but you seem much better than you did."

"I am hungry; oh! so hungry!"

"Have something to eat, then," said Blueskin, moved by the manner in which he spoke.

He knocked for the waiter, and in a few moments had a plate of bread and meat brought in, which Steggs devoured with the avidity of a famished tiger.

"Now answer me," said Blueskin; "surely I ought to expect something from your hands. Where is Edgworth Bess?"

"Edgworth Bess!"

"Yes—do not repeat my words, but answer me at once."

"I know not; I know not. I have not seen her for a long long time. But tell me, are you a friend of hers?"

"As much her friend as you have been her enemy."

"Have been," cried Steggs, "have been! I bitterly regret the past. Would that I did know where she was, and then I should have an opportunity of making some atonement for that which I have done."

"You repent, then?"

"Most heartily."

"And you know not where she is?"

"I do not. In search of her I have tramped all over London, but not the faintest trace can I find."

Blueskin groaned.

"She is not in Wild's possession," cried Steggs; "I feel almost certain of that. I have watched his house closely, but I have seen nothing to cause suspicion."

"Stay now," said Blueskin; "you are better now."

"Yes, thanks to you, much better."

"Then let us talk over matters a little, as quietly, if we can. In me you see the dearest friend that the poor girl, who is known best as Edgworth Bess, has."

"You, then, are—"

"No matter what; I am called Blueskin."

"Blueskin!" cried Steggs, starting, "then you are one of Jonathan Wild's men?"

"Not so; we are foes. Do you remember some one delivered you from the cells beneath his house?"

"I do. He was a tall and well-dressed gentleman."

Blueskin smiled.

"It was myself. The disguise was one which I had assumed for a particular purpose, but the necessity for which exists no longer. I set you free!"

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; my errand there on that night was to ascertain whether Edgworth Bess and Jack Sheppard—"

"Curse him!"

"Eh?"

"I say curse him!"

"Jack Sheppard?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why, because if it had not been for him and his interference, all would have been well."

"All would have been ill, you mean," cried Blueskin, "for then you and your rascally employer would have triumphed in your villainy."

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

STEGGS AND BLUESKIN MAKE A MUTUAL COMPACT, AND BOTH RESOLVE UPON JONATHAN WILD'S DESTRUCTION.

"FORGIVE me," said Steggs, in a deprecatory, humble manner. "Forgive me. I was carried away just then by my own bad passions, and knew not what I said; but I am one who finds it very hard to put up with a blow or defeat at the hands of any one, and both of these have I experienced at the hands of Jack Sheppard."

"I have been already made acquainted with the history of the past," said Blueskin, "and can understand your breaking out when I mentioned Jack Sheppard, but you will have to look upon him as a friend if you are sincere in your desire to do Edgworth Bess a service."

"That's it. I want, if I possibly can, to make reparation for the wrong I have done her. Whether I shall succeed is more than I can say, but I shall make the attempt."

"The best of us could do no more. Then listen to me, and I will explain that which seems strange to you. I had been attacked by Jonathan Wild, and left for dead. At the same time he captured Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess."

"I remember," said Steggs, gloomily. "I remember. It was at an abbey in Gloucestershire."

"It was. I recovered from the terrible wound I had received, and not wishing Jonathan to know that I was still in life, disguised myself in the manner you saw."

"In the cells?"

"Yes. Of course, knowing that both Sheppard and Edgworth Bess had been captured by Wild, I made sure of finding them beneath the cells in his house. So I watched him out, and then made a violent entry into the house, gained the cells, threw open the doors of every one, released you and another, but found not those whom I had come to seek. How we got out, and the rest, you know."

"I do."

"At my command, we separated; and now, having told you so far, explain to me by what chance you became a prisoner. I thought you were friendly to Lord Donnully's interest."

"And so I was."

"Then why were you confined?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"I do not know enough."

"I will tell you, then. Jonathan Wild wished to get his lordship wholly in his power, and was jealous of me."

"I see."

"So he took advantage of me, poisoned the ear of Lord Donnully with false doubts about me, and, in the end, was captured by his myrmidons, and lodged in the gloomy and pestiferous dungeon in which you found me."

"Then you are no friend of Wild's?"

"Friend! Ha! ha! I should like to cut his throat, and I will do it, too; I will do it!"

"Do not excite yourself. You will do yourself a serious injury if you do. It seems to me quite clear that our enemies—and by 'our' I mean myself, Jack Sheppard, and Edgworth Bess—are yours; and so, surely, we ought to work together. But we will leave that for the present. Tell me what became of you after your release."

"I can do so in a very few words, but I ought first to tell you that I have been, in times back, a bad and evil man—loving wickedness for its own sake; so when Williams, who had been an old comrade of mine, sent for me when on his dying bed, and related the story about the heiress of the Donnully estates, which I daresay you know, I promised him that I would do all I could to procure her that of which she had been deprived."

"Instead of which?"

"Instead of which, as soon as I left the chamber of death, I began to turn the matter over in my mind, and consider how I could turn it to the best advantage. My judgment deceived me. I thought the best bargain I could make would be to go to the nobleman who already had possession of the estates, and take part with him. I did so. The result, I need not tell you, for you know it already. I have been justly punished."

"You have," said Blueskin, "but—"

"One moment. I have not said now that which I intended. While in the solitude of the cell in which Jonathan had placed me, I had ample opportunities of thinking over the past. I repented, but repentance came too late. Nevertheless, when you set me free, I was an altered man. From that moment I looked upon Wild as my enemy; as for Lord Donnully, I scarcely consider him, in the state in which I last saw him, worthy of the enmity of any one!"

"He is a villain," said Blueskin, "and has acted like one, and I will take good care he does not escape the penalty due to his deeds."

"But it is Wild," said Steggs, fiercely. "I hate him, and I will have his life! But you see to what I am reduced. When you saw me, I was literally dying of starvation."

"I have saved you, then, and if you are sincere in what you have just said, we shall be friends in future. We ought to both work together."

"Our ends are the same."

"They are. The one purpose of my life is to restore poor Edgworth Bess to her rights, and if you will lend me your assistance, I do not doubt we shall both succeed. As for Jonathan, we have one or two little scores to wipe off."

"Tell me what I can do," said Steggs. "Show me how I can serve you and the heiress, and how I can obtain my revenge upon Wild."

"We must consider the matter over. It is one which cannot be decided upon in a moment. I have myself sworn to bring Jonathan Wild to the scaffold, and I will do it, even though I had to perish with him!"

"I, too, have made the same oath," said Steggs, with increasing energy, "and surely, between the two of us, it will be kept."

"It will on my part. But leave that. Will you swear that you are sincere in all that you have said to me?"

"I swear I am, and if you knew all the particulars of the case, you would not ask the question. No longer will I serve those who require my services in so ungrateful a manner."

"Then, that is sufficient. I will trust you, and I bid you beware how you attempt to play me false!"

"You need not fear."

"I warn you. And now, have you found no clue to the whereabouts of Edgworth Bess?"

"None whatever."

"She escaped from Wild's cells," said Blueskin.

"Are you certain of that?"

"Quite certain. I have the best evidence of it."

"You mean, you have seen her since."

"No; but I had it from the person who set her free!"

"I understand."

"But in some unaccountable way she disappeared, and since that time I have neither seen nor heard anything of her."

"I cannot think she is in Wild's possession."

"But you have no proof of that?"

"No; I have no proof, but I have watched his actions."

"And the result?"

"I cannot think he either has her at his house, or knows where she is."

"Ah! well. We must see. Jack Sheppard, I am afraid, is an inmate of Newgate."

"Again!"

"Yes, again!"

"How many times will that make?"

"Twice!"

"Then, if I was him, I should beware of the third."

"Pho! pho! Now, take my advice. Rest yourself and recover your strength, as well as you can. I will furnish you with money. You had better stay here, I should think."

"As you will; but in what way am I to assist you?"

"That we must consider."

"I have a plan."

"Have you?"

"Yes!"

"Is it a good one?"

"Yes!"

"Does it stand a fair chance of success?"

"I think so."

"Let me hear it, then."

"It is this."

He spoke a few words in a low tone.

What was their import will presently appear, but we cannot now disclose it.

Blueskin looked grave, and then he said—

"I am afraid it is impossible."

"How so?"

"I know by experience how hard he is to deceive."

"And I," said Steggs, "know my powers of deception! At any rate, if I make the trial, no harm can happen to any one save myself."

"No; that is true."

"Well, then, I think I ought to try it. Should I succeed, you know the advantage it will bring."

"It will."

"And is it not worth while to run a little risk for the accomplishment of so much?"

"It is; and I only hope you will succeed; but you must not think of trying for a day or so, or, at all events, until you have recovered your strength somewhat."

"Leave that to me, Blueskin; I will try my best, for I am with you body and soul, and not only that—I shall be serving your interests, and procuring my own revenge at the same time."

"The latter is a powerful inducement, no doubt. But you must be careful; the scheme, which you propose is a most difficult one indeed, and I am afraid you will find it impossible."

"Still I am willing to run the risk."

"Then you think, I suppose, no one ought to interfere. Should you succeed it will be a great thing for all of us. I shall go now and procure what intelligence I can. Do you in the meantime stay here."

"A little rest will enable me to recover my strength."

"Then employ that time in maturing your bold and daring plan. You ought to consider well before you attempt it."

"I shall do so, never fear. I am not one ready to throw my life away."

"Here is money, then. I may be some hours before I return; but do not you, on any account, stir forth. Let me feel sure of finding you here."

"You can rely upon me."

"I will leave you, then," said Blueskin, and as he spoke he set out upon his difficult errand.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

JONATHAN WILD ATTACKS THE PIRATES IN THEIR SECRET HAUNT, AND ACHIEVES A VICTORY.

JONATHAN WILD could not subdue a certain amount of very natural excitement which he felt upon seeing the door in the rocks which led to the pirates' cave.

He signalled to his men.

Some portion of his excitement seemed to have communicated itself to them, for they obeyed with unusual promptitude.

The second ladder was raised.

It was fixed in a similar manner to the first, and placed close beside it.

The men rushed up both with eager impetuosity.

The ladders, of course, were very soon quite full, and they would only hold a small portion of the men.

When all was in readiness, Jonathan prepared to give the word to demolish the door.

This they were told to do at one blow, if possible, and then they were to rush into the cavern as quickly as they could, and wait just inside the entrance until they had been joined by all their companions.

But just as he was about to do this, a slight rumbling noise was heard overhead.

He held up his hand for all to be silent.

They listened rather anxiously to know what was going to happen.

All put themselves in a posture of defence.

The next sound they heard, and which followed closely upon the other, was one to which they were all familiarized.

Some one was unfastening a door.

That door was the one through which they wished to pass.

Was it possible that they had arrived at the very moment when the pirates were about to leave their abiding place?

It might be so.

Or was it Hawkins, who, from some place or other, had observed their approach, and opened the door to facilitate their entrance?

Jonathan thought the latter the more probable supposition of the two.

But for once he was mistaken.

He was not, however, in possession of one little fact which the reader is.

Hawkins, who had so cleverly joined the pirate band, and hit upon so clever a means of conveying the requisite intelligence to Wild, had been detected in his treachery, and his life had paid the forfeit.

At that very moment, instead of busying himself about Jonathan and his affairs, he was lying cold and still in the rudely-hollowed grave, into which, by the commands of Captain Howlet, he had been cast when he was cut down.

And now the reader will please carry back his recollection to that scene in the cavern, when Edgeworth Bess having with so much courage and difficulty made her escape from her chamber, had fallen once more into the arms of the much-dreaded pirate.

Upon making this discovery, the poor persecuted girl ceased to struggle, and lapsed into a strange state of semi-consciousness.

Captain Howlet carried her into the outer cavern.

Then, with apparent suddenness, he gave the order to his men to go on board at once.

In obedience to this command, they had hastily got themselves in readiness, and hurried along the passage which led to the secret door in the rocks.

The captain brought up the rear, and when the extremity was reached, the door was unfastened.

But ere they could open it, a loud voice had cried out in a tone of command, and the door was flung open in their faces.

Then rushed into the cavern a large body of men.

These were Jonathan Wild and his band, who had arrived at this, to them, fortunate juncture.

Had they been a little later, the pirates would have been aboard their fast-sailing vessel, and there all hopes of capturing them would have been at an end.

As it was, he was just in time.

The pirates were taken completely by surprise.

Their ferocious captain was, however, the first to recover himself, and he shouted to his crew to defend themselves.

Before they could obey him, however, Jonathan had succeeded in obtaining a lodgment.

His men swarmed up after him.

The place would have been profoundly dark, had it not been for the dark lanterns which Wild's janizaries had brought with them.

These they unmasked, and held in their left hands.

In their right they grasped their swords.

The broad beams of light which passed through the lenses enabled them to see their adversaries distinctly, while they themselves remained invisible, for the bright light, falling on the faces of the pirates, dazzled them, and made them unable to see plainly.

In spite of the commands of their chief, they did not fight with that valiancy which one would have expected from men who had for so long a time succeeded in making themselves a terror to others.

A panic had taken possession of them.

When this is the case it is vain for the commander to hope for victory.

Jonathan's men, on the contrary, animated by the actions of their leader, and encouraged to do their utmost for the reward they would gain, fought with the greatest fury.

The pirates gave ground.

Captain Howlet, with such a feeling of ungovernable rage at his heart as to defy all power of depiction, strove to rally them.

But it was of no avail.

The retrograde movement had been commenced.

They could not stop.

Back—back, foot by foot, they went down the narrow passage leading to the large cavern.

The din of the conflict in that confined space was really terrific.

There were oaths, and cries, and shrieks, and fierce words of command.

Mingled with these were firing of pistols, and the clashing of swords.

Foremost in the fray was Jonathan Wild.

He swung his hanger round his head, and brought it down with a vigour and effect which testified in a very remarkable manner to the immense strength which he possessed.

And here he had the advantage of Captain Howlet.

He led his own men.

This, the latter did not, and could not do, for he held Edgworth Bess in his arms.

So strong was his passion for her, that he took no part in the fight, save by shouting to his men.

He kept in the rear with his prisoner.

Upon reaching the larger cavern, the pirates made a temporary stand.

There was a light here, too, which enabled them to see the numbers and position of their adversaries.

When they saw how nearly equal they were—that indeed their unexpected foes only out-numbered them by five or six—they experienced a momentary return of courage.

They began to grow conscious that they were fighting for their lives.

Finding that the various oil lamps placed about the cavern gave a tolerably bright and steady light, Wild's men threw away the dark lanterns, considering them unnecessary.

But Jonathan himself, happening to look in the direction where Captain Howlet stood, caught sight of a female form.

At that moment she struggled desperately, and uttered an ear-piercing shriek, which sounded high above all the din of the conflict, and echoed with a dreary, melancholy cadence in the off-branching caverns.

The face was turned towards him.

Jonathan saw it.

The shriek that came from the girl's lips was almost immediately followed by one of those terrible and unearthly roars to which at times the thief-taker gave utterance when anything occurred which surprised or angered him.

This time it expressed surprise.

And incredulity as well.

By what extraordinary succession of incidents came Edgworth Bess in the power of Captain Howlet, and an inmate of the pirates' caves?

He was at a loss to think.

He would have fancied it must be a case of mistaken identity, but he was too familiar with the girl's features to fall into any mistake of that kind.

He did not stop to speculate.

Rushing forward with redoubled fury, he aimed his way to where the pirate captain stood.

To reach him, however, he would have to cut his way through the whole band.

But to do this Wild did not shrink.

Right and left the pirates fell or gave way before the long sweeping strokes of his terrible weapon, which every time came down with so much force as to make a second blow unnecessary.

At last the pirates, one and all, threw down their swords and cried for quarter.

Jonathan Wild did not trouble himself to look whether it was granted to them or not, but made his way over a heap of the dead and dying to the captain, who even now would not relinquish his hold of Edgworth Bess, though she struggled most furiously in his arms.

But, upon seeing Jonathan approach, he fairly took her up, and ran with her in the direction of the excavation in the side from which the house above could be reached.

This place was quite dark.

Jonathan, however, did not stop for a light, but shouted to his men to bring one, and follow him.

The footsteps of the captain now ceased, and so had the cries of Edgworth Bess.

These had hitherto been a guide to him.

In an agony of apprehension, lest, after all, the girl should escape, he dashed forward, screaming out to his men to bring a light.

CHAPTER CL.

JONATHAN WILD CHASES CAPTAIN HOWLET, ALIAS COLONEL THORNE, THROUGH THE MANSION, AND OBTAINS POSSESSION OF EDGWORTH BESS.

JONATHAN, however, encountered no obstacle to his progress, nor could he hear anything but a slight rustling noise.

But his men, with lights in their hands, now made their way into the lesser cavern, for such it was, in which he stood.

It was, he found, of tolerable size, but as he glanced with his eagle eye about it, no trace of Captain Howlet and his prey could be seen.

But one of his men happening to glance upward, saw something, to which he called Jonathan's immediate attention.

At a considerable distance from the floor of the cavern, and climbing desperately up a rope, with Edgworth Bess in his arms, was the pirate.

This was a sight for which all were unprepared.

It was easy to perceive, from the manner in which she hung over his left arm, that the poor girl was insensible.

This would account for the cessation of her cries.

One would have thought, however, that even though she did not struggle, but hung a dead weight, it was quite impossible to ascend a rope so burdened.

But Colonel Thorne was a rather out-of-the-way sort of personage.

His gigantic form, and almost superhuman strength, for it was in keeping with his bulk, has been already reverted to.

This was one thing that assisted him.

Then another was, that he was a finished sailor.

Unlike many captains, there was no duty about ship which he could not perform with dexterity and ease.

Climbing a rope was one of them—perhaps, the one he could do best.

The knots in this rope, too, made a most wonderful difference.

But still the feat was one which few would have attempted, and fewer still have been able to carry out.

It was, let it be said, with the utmost difficulty that the pirate-chief performed it.

The rope, as the reader will doubtless recollect, had been cut by Lieutenant Morgan, and the end of it, instead of reaching nearly to the floor, as it had done at the time of Edgworth Bess making her descent, now was just about on a level with a tall man's head.

The cry that came from the lips of all, made the captain aware that he had been discovered; but so far from allowing that to daunt him, it only served as an incentive to fresh exertions, for all saw that his speed was accelerated.

Jonathan Wild, under the impulse of the moment, drew his pistol when he first saw it.

His finger pressed the trigger, and in another moment



[JACK SHEPPARD AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE ATTACKED BY THE POLICE.]

the weapon would have been discharged, but a sudden thought made him alter his intention.

That he would hit his mark there was little doubt.

But had he done so, what would have been the result?

The captain's hold upon the rope would have relaxed.

He would have fallen to the ground.

Had not the bullet slain him, the fall upon the rocky floor of the cavern most assuredly would.

Edgworth Bess was in his arms.

She would have fallen with him.

She would have met with the same fate.

Now, if there was one thing that Jonathan desired more than another, it was that the life of Edgworth Bess should be preserved, let the circumstances be what they might.

If she, through any unlucky accident, should perish, the whole of his deeply-laid plans would be annihilated—frustrated.

Accordingly he lowered the point of his weapon, and returned it to his belt.

Captain Howlet, if he had seen this threatening movement upon the part of his enemy, did not take the least notice of it, but bent the whole of his energies to the superhuman task of climbing upwards.

Strong and skilful as he was, he found that every foot he ascended cost him a greater effort than the preceding one.

No sooner had Jonathan restored the pistol to his belt, than he shouted—"Follow me, my men! Follow me!"

At the same moment he dashed forward, and grasping the end of the thick rope with both hands, commenced climbing up it.

The first was the most difficult part, because he had no hold for his feet.

When, however, he got up a little way, and could rest them upon the large knots, it became a comparatively easy matter.

It might be that the thief-taker was less expert than the pirate, but then that disadvantage was more than counteracted by his being unencumbered.

Wild's men, as soon as he had got high enough, one by one began to climb the rope, and they looked like so many rats on a string.

As the strain upon the rope increased, some very suspicious cracks were heard, calculated to excite the greatest uneasiness in the minds of those who heard them.

Jonathan, however, would not have stayed for a much greater danger than that.

Unheeding the ominous sounds, he continued his upward course; but, in spite of all his efforts, he did not gain much upon Captain Howlet, who had had an excellent start.

So long, however, as he did not reach the top of the rope much before he did, Jonathan did not care.

The darkness increased rapidly the higher they went up, for the only light of any kind there was in the place, was such as proceeded from the lanterns his men below had with them.

Not once, though, did Wild look down.

He fixed his eyes steadfastly upon the dusky form of the pirate-chief, and his burden above him.

More and more indistinct did they become, and he had to strain his vision to continue seeing them.

Suddenly, however, they disappeared.

Almost the same moment, too, the vibration of the rope from above ceased utterly.

"He has reached the top," thought Jonathan, and he increased his speed.

At this time he was probably fifteen or twenty feet from the floor of the cavern.

Hanging below him were four or five of his men.

The strain upon the rope was very great, but still not more than it could bear with safety, provided it was secured properly at the top.

But there was the question.

Directly he reached the top of the rope, Captain Howlet found the panel open, as Edgeworth Bess had left it.

This was fortunate for him, since it enabled him to gain the chamber with all the greater ease.

Thrusting her first through the aperture, the captain followed.

An awful expression of diabolical malice was on his face.

His secret was discovered.

His band destroyed.

Himself a fugitive.

But let the extremity of his fortune be what it might, he determined not to abandon the young girl, for whom he had conceived so violent and uncontrollable a passion.

She was still insensible, and lay in a huddled-up mass upon the flooring, just where he had placed her.

So great was his fatigue, that he found himself compelled to rest a minute or two in order to recruit his strength.

He laid himself down at full length upon the floor.

But ere he had been a second in this position he crawled forward a little, and holding his head over the verge of the abyss, peeped down.

Far below he could see the lights which were carried by the men on the floor of the cavern.

Then he, with difficulty, made out the form of Jonathan Wild ascending the rope.

This every now and then cracked with the strain that was put upon it.

The sound came to the pirate's ears.

It gave him a new thought.

The malignant expression upon his countenance deepened.

Raising himself a little, he sought with his hand in his belt.

He drew from a sheath suspended from it a large and beautifully-tempered dagger.

The few rays of light that found their way into the apartment seemed to focus themselves upon it, for, as he moved it, a faint gleam betrayed its presence.

Holding this dagger firmly in his right hand, he again sank down, so that his head was over the abyss.

This time he could tell his foes were much nearer.

But he could almost have shrieked with exultation at the utter discomfiture they were about to receive at his hands, but he deemed it most prudent to stifle the inclination.

Gently, so that his foe should have no indication of what he was about, and so take the alarm, Captain Howlet felt for the rope.

It was stretched to such a degree that it felt more like a bar of iron than aught else.

With the same gentleness as he had before used, the pirate, as soon as he had found the rope, drew his knife across it.

At the first stroke, only the outside of the strands were severed.

At the second, the dagger sunk further in.

He did not remove it from its position, but gently drew it across for the third time.

A tearing noise followed.

The remainder of the rope, unable to bear the strain, was giving way thread after thread.

Those below must have had some idea of their peril, but before they could escape, the rope, with a loud snap, gave way altogether.

CHAPTER CLI.

JONATHAN WILD HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE, AND IS MORE THAN EVER DETERMINED TO BRING THE CAREER OF CAPTAIN HOWLET TO AN END.

As soon as this sound reached his ears, Captain Howlet gave way to the inclination he had felt to indulge himself in a loud shriek of laughter.

It was discordant and unmirthful, and echoed mournfully in the cavern.

It was accompanied, too, by another sound, which all but drowned it.

This was the horrible cry of fear which Jonathan and his men uttered when they found themselves falling through space.

A few fleeting seconds passed.

Then they reached the hard, rocky floor of the cavern with a dull crash.

Quickly succeeding it came the yells of excruciating agony to which those gave vent who had received the slightest injuries.

The others were either dead, or in a state greatly resembling it.

It was rather strange that the thought did not occur to the crafty and politic brain of Jonathan Wild that the first thing the pirate would be likely to do upon reaching the top would be to sever the rope, and thus cut off all access to him.

Had he thought of it, he would not have trusted himself to climb up it in the manner he had, for fear of the consequences.

The best of us are apt at times, especially during any great excitement, to omit to take into consideration all the probabilities of the case.

In this instance Jonathan did not.

All seemed safe and still, so he continued his upward course at the best speed he could make.

All at once, however, he fancied he felt the rope lengthen.

A repetition of the same thing told him that it was no fancy, but reality.

A cold sweat broke out all over him.

The rope was giving way.

Under the impulse of the moment, he did what was, under the circumstances, the very best thing he could do.

He relaxed his hold upon the rope, and slipped down.

But, before he could reach the head of the man next him, the rope above, with the snapping sound we have recorded, gave way altogether.

Involuntarily, Jonathan shut his eyes, and uttered a groan of horror.

He fully believed that his last hour had come.

The belief was shared, and the cry of horror echoed by all who hung below him.

Then they reached the bottom.

In this fortune favoured Jonathan Wild to a greater extent than such a wretch deserved.

Those who were lowest were worst off.

Received the greatest injuries.

He was at the top.

Consequently, when all fell, he never reached the rock at all, but came down on the mass of men beneath him.

The shock of the fall was great, of course, and for a minute or so he was unconscious.

At the end of that time, however, he was in full possession of his faculties, both bodily and mental.

He had scrambled to his feet before the men who had

been standing below had recovered from the sudden surprise.

Every breath he drew seemed to invigorate Jonathan, and to show him that, after all, the injuries he had received from the fearful fall were very slight indeed.

"Quick! quick!" he yelled; "never mind those who are hurt! Run some of you to the entrance of the cavern, and bring the two ladders with you. Let a dozen descend into the boat, and be rowed to the nearest landing-place to 'The Larches.' Surround the house, and see that the pirate-chief escapes not!"

The men did not hesitate a moment, and well was it that they did not, but set off at full speed to the entrance.

A dozen then made their way into one of the boats which had conveyed them thither, and were swiftly rowed away into the darkness of the night.

The remainder then drew up the ladders, which were of very great length indeed.

The angles and turnings in the narrow passage leading to the cavern made it difficult for them to be carried, but these obstacles were, without much loss of time, overcome.

By the time they returned, they found Jonathan had prepared a quantity of rope, by the aid of which the two ladders were hastily but firmly lashed together.

Thus joined, they really looked as though they would enable him to gain the point he wished to reach.

The pirates had all been vanquished. Quarter had been refused to all of them, and all that remained of the much-dreaded Howlet band were a few bleeding, wounded forms, from whom it would have been a mercy to trample out what little of that mysterious essence of life which clung to them.

This was not done, however.

Five men had been on the rope with Jonathan.

Three of these were dead, and so were two more upon whom it happened to fall.

The other two were only partially injured.

Jonathan got off best of all.

The time that had been taken to do all this was really very short indeed, and before Wild had thoroughly recovered his breath, he commenced the ascent of the ladders.

This time he took a lantern in his hand, in order to see his way before him.

For fear lest the ladders should give way where they had been tied together, only one man was allowed to follow him.

Against what the top portion of the ladder rested, Wild, of course, had no idea.

As he mounted, which he did fearlessly and rapidly enough, he flashed his lantern about him.

The smaller cavern seemed to be of a very remarkable shape.

Generally the height of a cavern bears some degree of proportion to the diameter.

But in this case, all such proportion was set at defiance.

The diameter of it was only a few yards, but the height seemed many feet.

The sides were smooth, white, and even.

At last, as he ascended, Jonathan came to the conclusion that this shape was not natural, but that the roof of the cavern had been raised.

As he got higher, he soon found that the sides tapered in rapidly, so that the appearance presented was that of some huge funnel.

At length he reached the top round of the second ladder.

He directed the light of his lantern upwards.

Just out of his reach he could see the piece of rope dangling down where Captain Howlet had cut it.

Could he but grasp this, Jonathan felt that all would be well.

Cautiously, for the attempt was full of peril, he mounted two more rounds, and stood upon the topmost one, holding to the wall for support.

It was an awful situation.

The least tremor of the body, the least giddiness, and he must have been precipitated to the bottom.

Nothing could have saved him.

But Wild was cool and collected.

Even now, the rope was barely within reach of his out-

stretched hands, but at length he managed to take a hold of it with his fingers.

This grasp he soon increased, and then, when he had it in both hands, he quitted his foothold upon the ladder, and hung, suspended in mid air, by the mere strength in his wrists alone.

It was a feat which few besides those who had trained themselves to the performance of similar feats would have attempted.

Gradually Jonathan drew his body up until he reached the spring panel opening into the chamber which had been occupied by Edgworth Bess.

He could not see into this place, for when he had to make use of both hands, he had hung the lantern to his belt, it being provided with a handle made specially for that purpose.

The panel had been left just as Bess had propped it open.

No doubt Captain Howlet felt pretty sure that he had discomfited his enemies for some time to come, and, that now the rope was cut, it was quite impossible to ascend.

But he did not know the man with whom he had to contend.

He was, as the present narrative displays, a man with an expedient brain and an indomitable spirit, which would make him rise superior to any dangers.

The faint night light which made its way into the room, enabled Jonathan Wild to perceive the outlines of the aperture.

But knowing he was unsupported, he listened before he attempted to crawl in.

All was still.

The captain was not in that part of his residence, at all events.

Jonathan, therefore, ventured to climb through the sliding panel.

But he put himself in an attitude of defence as soon as he could, for fear the pirate should be lurking somewhere in the room.

By flashing the light of his lantern round it, however, he assured himself that it was empty.

The next step was to devise some means by which he could be joined by his men, for it would never do for him to engage the pirate single-handed.

Kneeling down, then, he saw that the one man who had followed him up the ladder was at the top of it, unable to proceed any further.

"Descend," said Jonathan, "and bring back the coil of rope. I will fasten it afresh, and then you will manage easily. Quick, there is not a moment to lose!"

The man, in his zeal to obey the thief-taker, did not stop to descend the ladder step by step, but striding his legs, he slipped down the whole distance.

Quickly seizing the end of the rope, and bidding two or three others to follow him, he ran up again.

He found, upon reaching the top, that Jonathan had taken off his neckcloth, and was holding it down at the full length of his arm.

The man comprehended in a moment what it was intended for, so taking the rope, he tied one end of the neckcloth to it.

When this was done, Wild drew the rope up, and, somehow or other, managed to secure it in the same manner as before.

Then he called out to his men to ascend as quickly as they could.

CHAPTER CLII.

COLONEL THORNE TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF USELESS TROUBLE, BUT DETERMINES TO CHEAT JONATHAN WILD.

WITH the rope thus placed, Jonathan's men had very little difficulty in making their way through the secret panel into the room where their leader was waiting for them.

The ladder, too, had been found quite strong enough to bear four of their number upon it at one time.

Jonathan only waited until he had got half-a-dozen men around him, and then drawing his own sword, and holding the dark lantern in his left hand, he called out to them to do likewise and follow him.

With these words on his lips, he flung open the door, for it was not fastened in any way, and passed through it. A flight of steps was just before him, and he ran down without hesitation.

At the foot of it numerous doors could be seen leading in different directions.

Which one to take to follow in the steps of Colonel Thorne was more than he could tell.

He hoped, however, that those of his janizaries who had gone round in the boat would be in time to surround the house, and make it impossible for him to leave it.

In a systematic manner Jonathan commenced an examination of the mansion.

Everywhere his eye turned, objects of the greatest beauty and value met his gaze, and, accustomed as he was to grandeur when visiting his noble patrons, Jonathan could not restrain his astonishment at the beauty of everything which he beheld.

He lost no time, however, by looking at these. He was one, who, having once set his mind upon an idea, never allowed anything foreign to tempt him from it.

Leaving the great thief-taker to prosecute his search, which, from the size of the mansion must, of necessity, occupy some time, we will turn our attention to Colonel Thorne and Edgworth Bess.

When he had, as he thought, completed the discomfiture of his foes, he remained for some moments leaning over the abyss, gloating over the pain which he had caused.

But he did not wait until Jonathan recovered.

Just before that interesting event, feeling that his strength had in a great measure returned to him, he rose.

Edgworth Bess still lay exactly in the same position upon the floor as that in which he had placed her.

This would indicate that her swoon, caused by repeated and continued frights, still held her faculties in bondage.

Captain Howlet made no effort to restore her.

He knew that while she was in that state he should have less trouble with her, and he had firmly resolved not to fly without her, if he could possibly avoid it.

Once more, then, taking her up in his arms, and feeling, although much fatigued, scarcely any inconvenience from her weight, he strode across the room to the door leading to the staircase.

This one, it will be recollected, was, while Edgworth Bess was prisoner, kept securely locked, and he had to waste a few minutes fumbling in the pocket of his coat for the key.

At last he grasped it, and then, thrusting it into the lock, shot back the bolt.

He flung the door open and passed through.

He had no light with him, but the place was too familiar to him for that to be much inconvenience.

He descended the staircase slowly and cautiously.

Turning to the left as soon as he reached the foot of it, he made his way along a kind of corridor, and thence through a small door into a room.

"Curses on this unlucky chance!" he cried, in tones of the utmost fury. "Another few minutes, and I should have been safe on board my bonny bark, with the black flag floating over me. Then all would have been well."

A small couch was in the room, and upon this he deposited poor Edgworth Bess.

"More than all, too, I am known. The well-kept secret of so many years laid bare! But, never mind, I have yet some time before me, and I will employ that time as best I may to my own advantage and my foe's undoing! I have been a dreaded outlaw on the deep! Now shall I begin a new existence on the shore. This place I must for ever abandon. It grieves me to think so, but there is no help for it. To stay here longer will be impossible."

He was silent for a moment.

"Let me see," he said, "I will first secrete about my person, in as small a compass as I can, a portion of my wealth. I shall have time to do that, for, ten to one, if it is known how easily the house may be approached from the sea. At any rate, I will risk it, for I might as well quit life at once, as leave this place without wealth in my possession!"

While thus speaking, Captain Howlet had not been idle or inactive.

In a recess in this room was a large oaken cabinet, a marvel to look at, with its quaint and intricate carving and massive bands of iron, which served at the same time to strengthen and adorn it.

This, by means of a key which he carried attached to a ribbon round his neck, the captain opened.

A multitude of little drawers were disclosed.

Opening one of these at random, he began, with great expedition, to transfer its contents to his pockets.

It consisted of nothing but unset gems of great size and brilliancy, each one of which must have been worth a large sum of money.

This was, indeed, stowing wealth into a small compass.

That one drawer alone contained sufficient to have satisfied the wants of a moderate man during a long life.

But these the colonel did not think enough.

He opened another drawer.

The contents were the same.

And so on he continued, until he had actually stuffed his pockets with brilliants.

The wealth which he thus had in his possession must have been enormous, and it is difficult to imagine by what means he became possessed of such a collection.

However, there they were.

"Much more," said the captain, "would I gladly take away, but I cannot. I must content myself with that which I have already, and get away in safety with it. That is the next important thing to do."

As he spoke, he carefully locked the doors of the cabinet again, so that it did not present any signs of having been opened.

This done, he turned towards the couch upon which he had placed the insensible and persecuted girl.

"You," he said, "shall be the partner of my flight. I know not how it is that I have conceived so violent and unquenchable a passion for you, nor is this a fitting time to speculate upon it. Still insensible," he added. "Well, perhaps it is better so, provided her insensibility does not endure for ever."

With these last words on his lips, Captain Howlet stooped over the couch, and raised his captive in his arms.

He turned towards the door.

But, ere he passed through it, he cast one last look upon the different objects the room contained.

"Farewell, old friends," he said, in a voice of affected jocularly, and as though he was addressing sentient beings, "farewell, all of you! Heaven knows into whose possession you may fall next, but I must leave you. It grieves me to do so, but I cannot stay. It will vex me to see another the inhabitant of this place; yet, stay—I have a thought! Yes, I will do it. I shall at least prevent that!"

The colonel again placed Edgworth Bess upon the couch, in order to carry out his suddenly-resolved-upon intention.

What it was will be quickly seen.

Advancing to the fireplace, he took from the mantelshelf a tinder-box.

He next heaped a quantity of paper and rubbish on the floor.

Then, by the aid of the above-named implement, he set fire to it.

The little heap blazed up brightly instantly.

He applied the fire to different portions of the apartment.

The walls were wainscoted, and the wood, owing to its great age, was in a very dry and rotten state.

It caught the fire as quickly as the most inflammable material would.

From the position of the room, Colonel Thorne well enough knew that if the fire once got fair hold of it, it would spread with great rapidity to the remainder of the mansion, and then all attempts to extinguish it would be futile.

Grief and satisfaction struggled for mastery in his breast, as he stood for a minute or two contemplating the destruction which was taking place around him.

Colonel Thorne was human.

He loved his home.

Not a single thing was in it that did not possess some special interest to him, and so he found it was, as he said, hard indeed to leave it.

No other person, however, would lay claim to them,

and he drew no small amount of consolation from this source.

Urged, however, by the heat of the flames, as well as the impolicy of staying longer, he once more, and for the last time, raised Edgworth Bess in his arms.

She moaned slightly, thus showing that, in spite of all her perils, she still lived.

The colonel carried her towards the door.

By the time he reached it, the temperature of the room had risen to an insufferable degree, and the walls were mere sheets of flame.

The reader will not fail to have perceived, by his actions, that the colonel entertained no idea of being in any imminent danger.

He calculated that some time must yet elapse before his foes made an attack upon him, if they did so at all, after the terrible repulse he had given them by severing the rope.

Leisurely, therefore, as one might call it, he had made his preparations for taking his departure.

He quite expected he should be able to do so, and be unmolested.

In this, however, he was doomed to be deceived.

He did not take into consideration the extraordinary character of the man with whom he had to deal.

He thought him disabled from taking any active measures just at present.

How woefully he was deceived!

At that very moment, the men who had been sent by Wild in the boat, under the directions of the men who were well acquainted with the locality, had reached the lawn, and formed a circle round the house, through which it would be impossible for him to pass undetected.

We have said he took Bess for the last time in his arms, and advanced to the door.

He had determined that, at all risks, she should share his flight.

He flung open the door, and would have passed out into the corridor beyond.

But just as he did so, his ears were saluted by a terrible shout.

A roar.

An exclamation came also from his own lips, and he paused where he stood.

Before him, blocking up the doorway, was Jonathan Wild and a dozen of his men.

CHAPTER CLIII.

THE COMBAT IN THE BURNING ROOM. JONATHAN WILD SAVES EDGWORDH BESS, BUT HAS SOME TROUBLE WITH COLONEL THORNE.

ONE would almost have thought that, upon seeing this spectacle, the wild pirate-chief would have then and there lost all hope.

But he did not, though what he did looked almost as though he had.

Perceiving the state of affairs outside, he did not attempt to attack them, nor did he allow them a chance of attacking him, but, with the suddenness of thought, darted back into the burning room, and closed the door behind him.

This was a feat that looked like absolute insanity or suicide.

Jonathan was frantic.

Edgwordh Bess, he feared, would after all be lost to him.

The pirate-chief had chosen to perish rather than surrender, and he had chosen that Edgwordh Bess should perish with him.

At least, such was Jonathan Wild's idea.

The first he might have done without the thief-taker raising a finger to prevent it, but as for the second, that was absolute destruction to all his most cherished schemes.

Accordingly he shouted to his men to batter down the door, setting them the example himself.

But the wily pirate had taken care to fasten it securely on the inner side, and all their efforts to force it proved abortive.

It was not, however, with any intention of seeking so disagreeable and painful a death as that which fire would

inflict which made the colonel retreat into the burning room, but he saw that it was absolutely impossible for him to cut a way through the mass of men before him.

It was not too late, he thought, to retreat into the room, and effect his escape by the window, and no sooner did the idea occur to him, than he set about putting it into execution.

The door of the room was fitted with a strong lock.

The key was inside.

To turn it took him but an instant only, and then he felt himself secure for a few minutes at least.

But by this time the temperature of the room had increased to an almost insufferable degree.

There was not much smoke, but what little there was was of a very pungent character.

He inhaled it with great difficulty.

His lungs seemed blistered by every breath he drew.

It had the effect of restoring Bess to consciousness, for she uttered a piercing shriek, which came to Wild's ears with the greatest plainness, and increased the agony of apprehension under which he already laboured.

His blows upon the door increased in fury.

Already it began to shake beneath his strokes.

Colonel Thorne, puzzled and confused by the heat and smoke and struggles of his captive, made the best of his way to the window.

But just as he reached it, and dashed it open, he found himself confronted by another body of men.

They were those who had been stationed on the outside.

A horrible curse, which made the blood curdle in the veins of Edgwordh Bess, came hissing from the parched throat of the pirate-chief.

He was ensnared.

There was no way he could turn to make his escape.

Crash, crash, came the blows upon the door, and at last, with a final effort, it was sent bodily inward.

Jonathan Wild, heedless of the fierce flames, dashed in.

The form of the pirate-captain and the girl he wished to save were clearly defined from the surrounding red.

They were near the centre of the room.

The colonel had been forced there by the flames, to stop the progress of which no effort had been made, and which had already seized upon the principal portions of the building.

He saw Wild coming.

Still retaining his hold upon Edgwordh Bess, he drew his sword and made a fierce thrust at him.

But Jonathan warded off the blow, and attacked him in his turn, though not with that fury which he otherwise would, for fear lest he should injure Edgwordh Bess.

"Yield, villain!" he cried. "Put down the girl, or give her to me, and you shall have a chance of your life! Do you hear me? Put down the girl, I say!"

Our readers may imagine the state of Jonathan's mind at seeing Edgwordh Bess in such imminent danger of losing her life. As for the colonel, he might have died a thousand times if he thought proper. His life was of no value to him at all.

But with the girl it was different.

Colonel Thorne, however, although he saw no prospect of escape from a lingering death, would not release his hold, but struck at Wild with his heavy sword.

The advantages were all on his side. Both were skilful swordsmen, but, then, Wild was afraid to strike.

The interior of the room, too, was like a furnace.

Wild's men, although he repeatedly called to them, were deaf to his calls. It looked too hazardous to enter, and they preferred braving his anger, if ever he came out again.

Of this they had some doubts, for the flames had seized upon the woodwork of the door.

The shrieks that came from the lips of Edgwordh Bess, who was now in full possession of her senses, were really heartrending.

Jonathan felt that he was blistering all over, that his apparel was already dried to such an extent that the least thing would cause it to burst into a flame.

A species of madness must have seized upon the brain of the pirate-chief, now that he had realized his truly desperate position.

But he attacked Wild with the blindest impetuosity.

Suddenly, however, the thief-taker saw an opening for his sword.

To see it, and make use of it, were simultaneous events. Shortening his arm, he lunged forward with his sword. The point entered the pirate's chest.

Such, too, was the vigour of the thrust, that the point came out of the back, and the hilt, with a dull, sickening sound, struck against his breast.

A yell of mortal agony came from the colonel's lips, but, badly hurt though he was, he did not give up the contest.

But his strength lasted only a moment.

Jonathan withdrew his sword.

A gush of blood followed it.

That gush of blood seemed to be the strength of Colonel Thorne, for when it had flowed away, he staggered, and the light hold which he had kept of Edgworth Bess relaxed.

The poor girl had never ceased to struggle, and now, by a stronger effort, she succeeded in freeing herself altogether.

Jonathan saw this, and darting forward, caught her in his arms.

But he had like to have paid for this action with his life, for the captain, with what little remaining strength he had, raised his ponderous sword with the intention of bringing it down upon his head.

By a chance, though, Jonathan saw him, and stepped aside just as the weapon was descending.

Raising his own sword, he struck it from the pirate's feeble grasp, and the next moment sheathed it in his breast.

The colonel staggered, reeled, then fell heavily upon the floor.

At the same instant a shriek of still greater anguish burst from the lips of Edgworth Bess.

Her apparel was in flames.

It is a wonder almost that this did not occur before.

With great presence of mind, Jonathan, seeing that he had nothing more to fear from Colonel Thorne, pulled off his huge coat, and wrapped it closely about her person.

This, if it did not actually extinguish the flames, in a great measure subdued them.

His next proceeding was to turn his attention to leaving the burning chamber.

If we were to say that five minutes had elapsed from the time he dashed into it up to now, we should be exceeding the length of the period.

But those who have witnessed a conflagration on a large scale can tell what progress can be made during that brief interval, especially when the flames have got a fair hold.

At the time he entered, as we have seen, not one of his janizaries would obey his orders and follow him.

And now, as Wild looked round him, he was not able to see any means of exit.

He was encompassed by a huge wall of flame.

He shouted aloud to his men, in order to tell by their reply which way he ought to take, but the roaring sound which the flames produced was so tremendous, that he feared he should not be heard.

Suddenly, however, he heard a faint cry, or what to him sounded like a faint cry, though, by its intonation, he could tell that it was a loud and lusty one, but subdued by distance, or passing through some medium which only partially transmitted sound.

He turned instantly in the direction from which the sound seemed to come, but ere he could advance a pace, there was a horrible crashing noise as though the roof was falling in.

Jonathan gave himself up for lost.

But it was not the roof which fell.

It was the wall, he thought.

But it was neither the one nor the other.

He could see a large gap, tolerably free from flame, and beyond it the open sky.

The window had fallen in.

Yes, that was it.

Jonathan dashed forward.

In its fall it had smothered the flames to some degree, and though in a minute or two he knew they would burst forth with redoubled fury, yet, if he was quick, he should be able to pass through before this occurred.

Darting forward, then, and shrieking out in a half-maddened manner to his men, Jonathan reached the window.

His men had heard the shouts, and approached.

They expected he was burned to a cinder.

In a moment Jonathan handed out Edgworth Bess, and ordered them to place her in safety on the lawn.

Then he began to scramble out himself.

Already had he got his one knee upon the window-sill, which was rather high from the ground, when some one or something clutched him by the ankle.

He tried to shake off the grasp.

He tried to continue climbing through the window.

Both in vain.

A vigorous tug was given to his leg, and, although he clutched desperately at the window-sill, he was dragged backwards with tremendous violence into the burning room.

CHAPTER CLIV.

COLONEL THORNE PERISHES AMID THE RUINS OF THE HOUSE, AND JONATHAN WILD REACHES NEWGATE-STREET IN SAFETY WITH HIS PRISONER.

No sooner did Jonathan reach the ground, than he felt the grasp shifted from his leg to his neck.

Exasperated beyond all measure, and endowed by passion with more than twice his usual strength, Wild, in his turn, grappled with his opponent.

It was Colonel Thorne.

The wounds which he had received from Wild's sword had not slain him, though it was impossible for him ever to recover.

But when he fell backwards, the fire had brought him to himself, and he crawled along the floor, and with great pain and difficulty, in the direction which Wild took.

He reached the window just as his enemy was passing out of it.

Maddened with pain and rage, he determined that his foe should not escape, but perish with him, and so, summoning what little strength he possessed, he grasped him with both hands by the ankle, and dragged him down.

Then he seized him by the throat, with the tenacity of a death grasp.

But Jonathan, although he had gone through so much fatigue, was the stronger man of the two.

Yet it was questionable whether he should be able to shake off his foe in time to save himself from being burned to death.

"Jonathan Wild!" gasped the colonel, in a hissing whisper, "you have conquered me, and I know it; but you shall not live to exult over your victory. You shall perish with me."

"Never!" replied his antagonist, and at the same time feeling in his pocket for his clasp knife. "Never!"

The colonel tightened his grip.

But Jonathan had got his formidable knife.

He opened the blade with his teeth.

It fixed itself with a snap, for it was furnished with a spring to prevent it closing.

Then he stabbed madly at his foe.

At first the blows made no difference, but at length Jonathan freed himself.

Then, with the utmost haste, he rose to his feet.

To his horror, however, he found the window nearly one sheet of flame.

But to hesitate or stay longer where he was would have been fatal.

Making a desperate spring, he alighted on the sill, and thence rolled down on to the lawn a mass of burns and bruises.

Here he was picked up by his men, who, after his fall back, had been unable to assist him, and carried to a distance from the burning mansion.

He swore most horribly the while.

And no wonder.

The pain he was suffering was almost more than he could endure.

"Water! water!" he shrieked; "curse you all! Bring me water! water!"

It so happened, when he made this frantic appeal, that they reached one of those artificial little ponds frequently seen in gardens, in which gold and silver fish are kept.

This he caught sight of, and rather than wait for any one to fetch what he wanted, he commanded them to put him down.

They knew better than to disobey.

On his hands and feet, then, he crawled to this little pond, and when he reached the edge, rolled himself fairly into it.

The cold water was delightfully refreshing.

The bottom of the pond was composed of smooth stones, and the water was not more than a foot in depth, and so he fairly bathed himself in it.

His clothes were burnt and smouldering in many places.

But now they were extinguished.

His impatience, however, to ascertain the condition of Edgworth Bess was too great to allow him to stay longer in the enjoyment of his cold bath.

He scrambled out, therefore, but he was officiously assisted by his men.

His appearance would have excited the laughter of most people, and a smile did flit over the faces of his followers.

He looked like a demon.

His head and face were blackened with fire and smoke.

His clothing hung in tatters about him.

"Where is the girl?" he cried.

"Here, Mr. Wild. This way, if you please."

Jonathan growled, and followed the man across the lawn to a place where Edgworth Bess had been laid.

A garden seat had been selected for this purpose.

Her clothes had been extinguished by the men, but she was again insensible.

Her fair face and hands were burnt and blistered in many places, but she had not received anything like such injuries as Jonathan Wild.

At the first glance, so death-like did she appear, that Jonathan fancied he had had all his trouble for nothing.

But he was assured by the men that it was nothing more than a faint.

"Run, some one," he cried, "and fetch a carriage of some sort. Haste!"

A couple of the janizaries set off at a run to carry out the order.

Then Jonathan, feeling that, for the moment, he could do nothing more for the poor persecuted girl, turned his attention to the burning mansion.

It was now nothing but one mass of flames.

The colonel was right when he calculated that the fire would quickly communicate itself to every part of his dwelling.

It had done so; and, although so short a time had elapsed since he struck the first spark, the place was almost utterly consumed.

Nothing had been seen of Colonel Thorne.

The men had carefully kept watch all round, in order to see that he did not make his escape.

Jonathan gazed upon the scene of devastation before him with satisfaction.

He had triumphed.

Doubly triumphed.

The much-dreaded pirate band had been exterminated.

The pirate-chief had perished in the fire which his own hands had kindled.

He had escaped death half-a-dozen times by a miracle.

But more than all, he had recovered possession of that which he valued above all other things on earth.

Edgworth Bess.

Yes; the poor girl, who seemed fated to meet with nothing but misfortune, was once more in the power of that bold, bad man.

We fairly tremble when we think of the dangers she has, up to the present time, passed through.

But we shudder when we think of what there is in store for her.

Do not, however, let us anticipate the course of events.

It is a struggle of feeble right against powerful wrong.

Which will be victor?

By his order, Jonathan was taken to the window, through which he had made his desperate leap.

The inside of this room was now like a furnace.

Surely no one could survive in such a heat.

But suddenly, as he gazes, he observes a slight movement of some dark object within.

Jonathan strained his eyes, and approached as near as the intense heat would let him.

Yes, something moved.

But what?

Could life have had so strong a hold upon the ferocious pirate-chief as not to have quitted him.

It would seem so.

An arm was raised aloft and then another.

Then came forth a scream of agony, which made itself heard above all other sounds.

Next, one blackened arm was placed over the window-sill.

The other followed.

Then a charred and blackened mass slowly drew itself up upon it.

Jonathan turned sick at the sight.

"It will be a mercy to put him out of his misery!" he said, and as he spoke he drew a pistol from his belt, aimed it carefully, and fired.

There was a report and a shriek.

The blackened form, which was all that remained of the pirate-chief, toppled backwards into the furnace.

Ere, however, he could actually have fallen, the whole roof of the rambling building fell in, burying everything beneath its ruins.

Such was the end of the wealthy and envied Colonel Thorne, *alias* Captain Howlet, the pirate.

* * * * *

On the morning of the third day after the incidents just recorded, a coach, drawn by two horses, went lumbering along the Old Bailey.

The equipage itself, as well as the cattle which drew it, gave token that they had just made a long and fatiguing journey.

It was just about sunrise, but the sun had not yet made himself visible to the dwellers in the city.

At that early hour the generally busy street was quite deserted.

There was no one to observe the coach, which came up the Old Bailey from the direction of Ludgate-hill.

Upon reaching the corner, the driver turned his cattle to the right, and, after proceeding a few paces, came to a halt close to the prison wall, or rather opposite a gloomy, dilapidated house which adjoined it.

This house, which had every appearance of being uninhabited, must be known to the reader of this history.

It would seem, however, that the arrival of the coach was expected, for no sooner did it stop than the front door of the house was thrown open, and a man appeared upon the threshold.

At the same moment the handle of the coach-door was turned, and the door itself flung open.

A man emerged.

One glance at his hideous physiognomy would have enabled any one to recognise him.

It was Jonathan Wild!

Turning round, he put one foot on the step, and lifted out of the carriage a sleeping or insensible form.

That was Edgworth Bess.

The man on the threshold stood in a deferential attitude.

That was Tonks.

Jonathan Wild once more carried, as a prisoner, into his house the heroine of this story, the poor, persecuted heiress, Edgworth Bess.

Heaven help her!

CHAPTER CLV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND HIS COMRADES ATTACK THE OFFICERS AND FIND THEMSELVES OUTNUMBERED.

THE report of the pistol which Flood fired at John Roots, the carpenter, as he was descending the staircase, sounded in the silence of that house like the discharge of a cannon.

Certainly it would rouse the whole neighbourhood.

The cry, too, which came from the lips of John Roots was loud and ear-piercing.

Then he fell with a dull, sickening crash down the rest of the staircase.

"Fool!" cried Jack Sheppard, in an angry voice, turning to Matthew Flood, who was quietly replacing the pistol in his pocket. "Fool! you have ruined all!"

"Fool yourself!" roared Flood, angrily. "You'd better mind what you're at. I've got another pistol in my pocket."

"Then you had better blow your own brains out with it, and cheat the hangman, for we shall be nabbed now for a certainty."

His words were followed by the springing of several rattles in the streets, and from the upper part of the house, which was occupied by another family, came cries for help.

"I couldn't help it," muttered Flood. "If he had gone on with his shouting, there would have been an end to us, I daresay."

"You thirsted for his blood," said Jack, savagely, "and I wanted no blood spilt. I undertook the enterprise more with a view of keeping in with you than anything else, and see how you have served us."

"We must make the best of a bad bargain," said Blewitt, "and not stand haggling here. Come, Jack, settle your row with Mat. another time. Let us be off. Where is the back-door?"

"There is none."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"Then we are done for—hark!"

As Blewitt pronounced the word, several heavy blows were struck upon the shop door.

"They will find out the shutter in a moment," continued Blewitt, and then it will be all over with us. What shall we do, Jack?"

"Don't ask me," replied Sheppard, "who was stooping down over the prostrate form of his late master. 'Settle it between yourselves.'"

The two men were much disconcerted by Jack's behaviour.

They had great reliance upon him, and had every faith in his opinion.

The blows upon the outer door redoubled.

But Jack heeded them not.

Gently he raised his master's head, and tried to move him from the awkward position in which he had fallen.

But his efforts were followed with such a cry of dreadful agony from the lips of the injured man, that he desisted.

He let the head sink into the same position.

Then he heard that strange rattling sound in his throat which is the certain forerunner of death.

Feeling that he was beyond his aid, and bitterly regretting that he should have ever undertaken or shared in this night's work, he deemed his next duty was to see after his own safety.

The two men he had with him, who had first prompted him to do the deed, and to one of whom their present dangerous position was owing, were standing together.

They could not tell what to do for the best.

"What shall we do, Jack? What shall we do?" asked Blewitt, in an agony of apprehension.

"I know not."

"Is there no escape?"

"None."

"Don't say that, Jack."

"Why not? It's the truth, and may as well be said as not."

"Is there no means of getting out?"

"None, except by the window or the door."

"Our foes are there."

"I know it."

"Then we are lost."

"And through your own folly. You wanted to take his life, and I wanted you to spare it. You have had your own way, and now take the consequences."

"I am very sorry, Jack," said Flood. "Don't let's have any ill blood just now. What I did was for the best."

"How many men are outside?"

"I don't know."

"We must find out, then. Perhaps, if we are quick, we shall have a chance of getting off."

Jack Sheppard, intimate as he was with the place, was the person best fitted to ascertain these two points, so, setting his two companions to guard the staircase and prevent any one descending, he glided into the shop to reconnoitre.

No steps had actually been taken to break down the door, or it would have been demolished long since.

Those outside had contented themselves with merely hammering upon it, and demanding entrance.

Jack knew by going to the window where they had

entered, and pushing the shutter the least bit open, he should be able, not only to see, but to hear all that was taking place just in front of the door.

To his dismay he found, upon putting this manoeuvre into execution, that upwards of a dozen persons had assembled.

Most of them were watchmen.

"Shall we break down the door?" said one.

"There's murder inside," said another.

"Stop till the officers come," cried a third.

"Here they are, then," said a fourth.

Another second, and a compact body of police-officers arrived upon the scene.

"Murder—murder," cried all. "There's murder being done in old Roots' house. Break the door down, they won't open it."

"We'll soon see about that," said some one, in a pragmatical tone of voice. "Keep a good look, all. See that nobody leaves the premises. Now, my men," he cried to the officers, over whom he seemed to have some command, "down with the door, and be quick about it."

"All right, sir," was the reply, and a furious attack was made upon the door.

So furious a one that it could not possibly long withstand it.

The position of the housebreakers was getting desperate.

What was to be done?

Jack withdrew from his place of observation and made his way to the foot of the stairs.

"Come," he said, "we have only one chance!"

"Who is outside?"

"Twenty people, at least, and more than half are police-officers."

"Then we are lost!"

"I fear so."

"They are breaking down the door."

"You are right. I heard the order given for them to do it."

"And they will soon have it open."

"You are right."

"But what chance have we got?"

"Let them in."

"Let them in?"

"Yes!"

"But how can that be a chance?"

"Cannot you see?"

"No!"

"Come on, then, and you will."

"But you don't mean to open the door?"

"Yes, I do!"

"But how will that give us a chance? I should think that will be throwing a chance away."

"Not a bit of it; quite the reverse."

"How so?"

"They won't be prepared for such an event, will they?"

"No, I should think not."

"Of course they won't. Then they will be taken by surprise."

"I understand."

"I will unfasten the door quietly."

"Yes, yes."

"And then fling it open."

"All right."

"The moment I do so, and before they have time to recover from their surprise, dash out amongst them. Let each one look after himself, and in the confusion, we shall, ten to one, escape."

"Capital, Jack."

"Don't attempt to keep together. Let each one try to fight himself free, and let each take different directions."

"All right, Jack. Quick! quick!"

"Yes, or I shall be too late."

The door of the carpenter's shop was a strong one, or it would not have so long resisted the heavy blows that were rained upon it.

It had given way, however, in many places.

With all the speed he could, Jack made his way to the door.

He had fastened it some hundreds of times, so he was at no loss to find the bolts and lock.

As gently as he could he undid them.

But he found this a more difficult matter than he



[STEGGS, IN DISGUISE, SEEKS EMPLOYMENT FROM JONATHAN WILD.]

imagined, owing to the manner in which the door had been strained.

He succeeded, though, in undoing all but the bottom bolt, and at the time he was unfastening this, the door was sent violently inwards.

He escaped being thrown down by a miracle.

The two men were standing in readiness to dart out, according to his commands.

He sat them the example.

Uttering a shout, which they echoed, he sprang over the fallen door into the street.

As he had fully anticipated, the officers and others, who were congregated there, were completely taken aback by this sudden sortie.

It was the last thing they expected.

But there were too many, and they stood too closely together for them to get away in the manner that Jack intended.

Before they got clear, those whom they had first attacked

recovered from their surprise, and turning round, attacked them.

The chief police-officer, who, from prudential motives, had not taken any part in the affray, but stood at a little distance, like a skilful general commanding his troops, saw in a moment the state of affairs.

He instantly shouted to those on the outside of the little crowd to stop them.

This they did as well as they were able

Then a fearful struggle commenced.

Attacked both in the front and the rear, the three housebreakers stood but little chance.

Jack, however, drew a knife from his pocket, and struck out furiously with it.

But the numbers were too unequal for the contest to endure for any length of time.

They were surrounded on all sides.

Again and again, however, did Jack make violent efforts to free himself, but in vain.

CHAPTER CLVI.

JACK SHEPPARD AND HIS TWO COMPANIONS ARE MADE PRISONERS BY THE POLICE.

EACH moment, too, that elapsed served to make their hopes of escape grow fainter and fainter, for the crowd was continually augmenting.

The whole neighbourhood by this time was thoroughly alarmed, and from the adjoining courts the people poured out in shoals.

The officers closed more closely round the three struggling housebreakers.

Flood was the first captured.

A well-directed blow laid him prostrate, and before he could recover his feet, two or three of his foes fell bodily upon him, and kept him down.

In a moment afterwards Blewitt was surrounded and made senre.

Jack Sheppard saw now that all hopes of making an escape were at an end, but yet he would not surrender.

On the contrary, he fought with greater desperation and fury.

But not for long could any one contend against the force of such overwhelming numbers.

His knife was forced from his grasp.

He was seized by a dozen different hands in a dozen different places.

Then one, more dexterous than the rest, slipped on a pair of handcuffs.

He was a prisoner.

But they found it necessary to secure his ankles with a piece of cord, so furiously did he struggle.

Then, indeed, he was powerless.

As soon as this was done, the prisoners were left in charge of a strong body, of police and the remainder headed by their chief, entered the carpenter's shop.

John Roots was a lonely man.

He occupied only a portion of the house in Wych-street himself.

The upper portion he let out to a poor but respectable family.

These had first spread the alarm by opening a window and springing a rattle.

They had, however, after hearing the pistol-shot, been afraid to descend the stairs, lest they should meet with a similar fate.

The chief police-officer and most of his followers were provided with dark lanterns.

They removed these from their belts, and unclosed the slides.

Passing through the shop into the little parlour at the back, they came to the foot of the staircase.

Here, weltering in his blood, they found John Roots, the carpenter.

An ejaculation of horror came from the lips of all.

The sight was one which they had not expected to see.

"Raise him gently," said the chief officer to his subordinates, after a few seconds' silence. "Raise him gently, and see if he yet lives."

This was immediately done.

An awful groan came from his lips.

So horrible was the sound, that all recoiled.

John Roots, then, was not yet dead.

Jack Sheppard must have been mistaken when he fancied he heard the death-rattle in his throat.

"Carefully," said the chief officer again. "Carefully."

"He is alive, sir."

"Yes, so it seems, but it is as much as he is. Let us try if we can learn anything from him as to his murderers."

"I am afraid he is too far gone, sir."

The chief officer knelt down beside the carpenter, and said—

"If you have yet life enough in your body, let your last breath be spent in declaring the name of the person who has done this deed."

The words reached the ears of John Roots.

He comprehended their import.

Hovering as he was upon the brink of another world, he, by an effort, recalled his wandering senses, and made an effort to speak.

But vainly.

The bullet from Flood's pistol had entered his breast, and lodged in his lungs, which were almost full of blood.

By a slight movement of his hand, however, he signified his wish to be raised to a still more upright position.

He was instantly obeyed.

Then once again he strove to speak.

"Tell me," cried the chief of the police, once more, "who is your murderer?"

The struggle which the old carpenter made was a fearful one.

None who witnessed it could repress a shudder.

"J-J-Ja-Jack"—

"Jack!" cried the astonished officer. "Jack who? Speak—speak!"

"Sh-Shep-Sheppard!" said John Roots, with a kind of shriek.

"Jack Sheppard?" cried the officer, in a loud tone of voice. "Are you sure that is the name of the person who murdered you?"

The carpenter nodded his head several times with great rapidity.

And that was the last thing he did.

Something else appeared to strike him—something, perhaps, which might in some way tend to qualify what he had just said—but his voice failed him.

Then a quantity of blood gushed from his mouth.

All was over.

He sank back into the arms of the officers who had been supporting him, a dead weight.

"This is a serious business," said the chief officer.

"Not only has the house been broken into and robbed, but murder committed likewise. You have heard, all of you, the last words uttered by this poor old man. You must recollect them, for the time will come when you will have to swear what you have heard."

"All right, sir; we'll recollect. There can't possibly be any sort of mistake. He spoke plain enough."

"He did."

"What is to be done next, sir?"

"Why, half-a-dozen of you had better take charge of the house, and I will accompany the prisoners to Newgate, the only place which is strong enough for such desperate offenders."

"Very good, sir."

"Leave the body just as it is. Don't touch it yourselves, or allow any one else to do so, until after the jury have been to see it."

"All right, sir."

"And don't admit any one, on any pretext, until after the inquest."

With these words, the officer made his way to the front of the house.

Here were the three prisoners, completely at the mercy of their captors.

Resistance upon their part had long since ceased.

"Call a hackney coach," cried the officer in command.

"You will find one on the rank by the church."

One of his men at once set out for the church, close to the railings of which, as at the present day, hackney coaches were always to be found waiting.

In a few minutes he returned with one of those lumbering vehicles, so long a reproach to the streets of London.

They were, however, capable of holding more persons than the present cab, so Jack Sheppard, Flood, and Blewitt were pushed in, and three police-officers followed.

There were thirteen officers in all.

Six had been left in charge of the house.

Three had entered the coach.

One sat on the seat beside the driver.

Three more upon the roof.

In this way, then, with a dense mob yelling at their heels, Jack Sheppard and his companions were conveyed to Newgate.

It was early dawn, and people generally were beginning to be astir.

The streets, too, were partially light, so that as those officers who were seated on the roof of the coach looked back, they could plainly perceive the crowd of people who were thronging after them.

But though they could see them collectively, they could not distinguish them individually.

As for Jack, he could not see them at all, nor did he wish to do so, but he could hear their yells and shouts of execration as they followed.

In the crowd was one man who, among the rest, was unnoted.

He was tall, and muscularly formed.

But, by stooping, he strove, as much as possible, to disguise this height and robustness of frame.

His desire, evidently, was to escape observation as much as possible.

But in this he was only to a partial extent successful.

Those who were nearest to him could not help noticing the peculiar appearance of his physiognomy.

It wore a strange dark tint.

But this man, whom the reader, from this description, will doubtless recognise, did not stay long in one place, or afford any of the curious gazers much opportunity of studying his features, for he hurried on, forcing a way through the thickest of the crowd.

This was Blueskin.

After leaving Steggs in the manner we have related, at the public-house in the Borough, he had gone from one place to another in search of Jack.

From reasons well known to the reader he did not succeed in his search.

Wearied out and exhausted by all the multitudinous events of the night, he was passing along Wych-street, when he heard a great disturbance.

Any unusual circumstance, of course, attracted his immediate attention.

Hurrying forward, then, he found a small crowd of people assembled before a house.

He knew it at a glance.

It was the house of John Roots, the carpenter.

With a forboding feeling at his heart that all was not well, Blueskin paused and mingled with the crowd, which every moment kept increasing.

What he saw while he waited, the reader already knows.

He heard, too, that murder had been committed.

When the three burglars had darted out of the house in the manner we have described, he lent all the aid he could to assist them to escape.

But, single-handed, he could do little or nothing against such numbers, and he was fearful of being arrested with them.

As things stood, it was clearly his best policy to keep out of danger.

Immured in one of the cells in Newgate, what assistance could he be to his young comrade?

But free, he would doubtless be able to accomplish much.

Therefore, when he saw them all three made prisoners, he followed the coach, in order to see whether Jack was really taken to Newgate, or to Jonathan Wild's house.

CHAPTER CLVII.

JACK SHEPPARD IS DULY CONVEYED TO NEWGATE, AND PROVIDED WITH AN EXTRA HEAVY SET OF JEWELRY.

THE officers, however, who had taken Jack prisoner were not Jonathan Wild's men, but regular Bow-street runners.

They had been specially sent out to apprehend Jack Sheppard for his daring escape from the prison.

Therefore, being armed with a special warrant, they drove him to the Old Bailey direct, instead of taking him to the lock-up, having him brought before a magistrate in the morning, and then fully committed for trial.

The hackney-coach lumbered up to the chief entrance of the old prison-house, and the officer who sat by the side of the driver got down and knocked at the portal.

The man on the lock, who was in a kind of half sleep, had heard the carriage stop, and, anticipating from that the arrival of some one of consequence, he quickly responded to the summons for admission.

By the time the door was open, however, the officers had got down off the roof and opened the door of the coach.

Then the others alighted.

The mob formed round in a dense circle, and they pressed forward so much that it was found necessary to obtain additional assistance from the prison to keep them at a respectful distance.

Then, one by one, the prisoners were handed out.

Blawitt happened to be nearest to the door, so he came first.

He was dogged and sullen, and made not the least attempt at resistance.

As a matter of course, his presence was greeted by a yell of execration.

The distance from the coach door across the pavement to the door leading into the prison was but short, so he was not exposed for long to the popular indignation.

He was hustled in.

Jack and Flood sat opposite to each other, so there was little to choose who should come out first, but Jack hung back.

It is possible that he had some insane idea of making his escape, for when Flood was dragged out, and while he imagined the attention of the officers was occupied by so doing, he looked through the window of the coach, next to which he sat.

But, if he had any idea of making his escape, it vanished when he saw how completely he was hemmed in by hostile faces.

He uttered, however, a slight exclamation, though he stifled the sound as much as he possibly could.

Among the crowd of faces he saw one that had not an unfriendly expression upon it.

It was a face well known to him.

He was evidently there to bid him be of good cheer.

It was Blueskin's face.

The next moment, however, he was seized by the officers and dragged out.

His ankles had been tied together with a cord, but, in order that he should be able to walk into the prison, these bonds were severed.

The moment Jack found these limbs at liberty, the first use he made of them was to salute his captors with several hearty kicks, each one of which drew loud curses from their lips.

But there were too many of them for him to gain much by resistance.

By main force he was dragged out and hurried into the lodge, where a dozen or so of turnkeys had assembled, and where Flood and Blawitt still stood.

The moment he was fairly in, the ponderous door was closed after him with a clang, at once shutting the world out from him.

The first thing that attracted Jack's attention after his arrival, was a slight bustle and confusion at the other end of the lodge.

He was well enough acquainted with the interior of Newgate already to know what it meant.

The governor was coming.

His old enemy, Mr. Noakes.

Excited and out of breath, for, upon receiving the intelligence that Jack had been recaptured, he had jumped out of bed, hastily attired himself, and hurried down to the lodge.

"Ha! ha!" he said, with an air of triumphant satisfaction, the moment he perceived Jack, and was convinced by ocular demonstration that the agreeable intelligence which had been brought to him was true. "Ha! ha! my young spark, so we have got you safe back again, have we! Well—well, I thought so. It was very unwise of you to escape; you might have known you would be taken again. You won't get away this time, I'll take good care of that. There's Godfrey, the turnkey, that you murdered in the corridor. You will have that to be tried for."

"But he has committed another murder since that, Mr. Noakes," said the chief police-officer.

"Another murder!" cried the governor, starting back a step. "How? where?"

"He has committed a burglary as well, and these two men, who belong to Jonathan Wild, assisted him."

"But who has he robbed?—who has he murdered?" asked the governor.

"His old master, John Roots, the carpenter, in Wych-street."

"Ha!"

"I have left six of the men there in charge of the premises, to watch that nothing is touched."

"Quite right, Mr. Skellum—quite right."

"He will have to be brought before a magistrate in the course of the morning, I suppose?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then I must be in attendance to give my evidence, which, of course, will procure the committal of all three of them to the assizes."

"They won't have long to wait, then."

"No, sir."

"The sessions begin the day after to-morrow. You had better stay with me, Mr. Skellum. What's the time?"

"About a quarter to five, sir."

"Oh! ah! Very well, then it will be about five hours before we want to start to Bow-street. We must take care to make them secure for that time. Come with me, Mr. Skellum, and after that we can breakfast together."

The governor was wonderfully condescending.

But there was a reason for it.

He was curious to learn the particulars of Jack's apprehension.

Mr. Skellum looked pleased.

The governor was always rather chuffy with the officials under him.

Indeed, in more respects than one, he resembled his great prototype, Jonathan Wild, with whom it will be recollected he was upon tolerably good terms.

Consequently, Mr. Skellum felt much flattered at having this amount of condescension shown him.

"Groots!" cried Mr. Noakes. "Groots! Where's Groots?"

"Coming, sir," replied a voice, and directly afterwards a man appeared, who looked as though he had been rather hastily aroused from a deep slumber.

"Get ready three sets of irons—the heaviest you can find, and be quick about it."

Groots, who at that time was the smith employed to rivet the fetters on the limbs of the prisoners, disappeared.

Two turnkeys followed him.

Immediately afterwards they returned, dragging behind them a mass of iron, which raised a thousand lugubrious echoes in its passage over the stones in the corridor.

They were left in a confused heap, just between the governor and the prisoners.

"Are they all the same weight," asked the former, as the smith began separating them into three heaps.

"No, sir; they isn't."

"Which are the heaviest?"

"These, sir," replied Groots, pointing to one lot. "The others be main heavy, but this set is heavier by a good bit."

"So much the better," replied Mr. Noakes; "you will put them on this young spark. It isn't the first time you have done a similar job for him, and see that you do it better than the last."

The smith, hearing these words, looked up.

Upon seeing Jack, he knew him instantly.

"Oh! yes. I recollect," he said. "Well, if he gets out of these, I'm a Dutchman."

Jack smiled contemptuously.

Of this Mr. Groots took no sort of notice, but, as soon as his little preparations were completed, set about riveting the irons upon him.

Jack Sheppard had sufficient good sense not to exhaust himself in struggling uselessly against superior numbers, so he quietly submitted to the irons being placed upon him.

Flood and Blewitt seemed to take their cue from him, for they behaved in a precisely similar manner.

So far all being well, the governor proceeded to accompany them to the dungeons.

And here let us take the opportunity of reminding the reader that a cell in Newgate in Jack Sheppard's day was a very different thing to what it is now.

The prison itself, even, has been wholly rebuilt, and the only traces of the ancient edifice which now exist, are those buried beneath the present Newgate-market.

The cells now are uniformly clean, well-ventilated, and light.

Then they were devoid of all these comforts.

It was considered that the strongest cells were those deepest down in the prison, and it was towards these that the prisoners were led.

Doors innumerable, and corridors without end, were passed through. Staircases were ascended and descended.

But, on the whole, the downward staircases preponderated.

A very strong escort of turnkeys and officers accompanied them, and, both before and behind, the narrow passages were filled up with their bodies, so that, had they

been free from the heavy manacles, they could not have had the least prospect of escape.

The three prisoners were placed in three different cells, and there secured.

It seemed almost foolish to take so much trouble, when their sojourn would be so short, but they knew the slippery customers they had to deal with, and, therefore, did not abate any precautions.

The governor, at any rate, was determined that the fault should not be laid to him if they got free.

Having seen all secure, he posted a sentinel before the door of each cell.

Then he returned to his own portion of the prison, to properly dress himself, and partake of the breakfast which he had invited Mr. Skellum to share with him.

This was done, and, during the discussion of the meal, as we have hinted, he managed to extract from the police-officer a very ample account of the whole of the circumstances attendant upon Jack Sheppard's apprehension.

"He will swing," said the governor, triumphantly. "I am sure of it. And a good job, too; for, as you know, Mr. Skellum, I have got into no end of disgrace through his getting away the time before."

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE MAGISTRATE AT THE BOW-STREET POLICE-COURT DULY COMMITS JACK SHEPPARD, MATTHEW FLOOD, AND WILLIAM BLEWITT TO TAKE THEIR TRIAL AT THE ENSUING SESSIONS FOR BURGLARY AND MURDER.

No doubt the reader can easily believe that the reflections of Jack Sheppard himself, in his cold and cheerless dungeon, were of anything but a pleasant description.

In the bitterness of his heart, he over and over again cursed himself for having listened to the proposals of the two men to commit a burglary at John Roots'. Over and over again did he curse them for acting in the manner they did, and causing him to be apprehended and lodged in prison.

So short a time, too, had elapsed since he had succeeded in effecting his last escape, and during that time he had positively done nothing.

The whereabouts of Edgworth Bess, and whether she was still alive, were things he knew not, and had failed to ascertain.

That, if alive, she was detained somewhere against her own inclination, he felt confident, or, long ere this, she would have found some means of communicating with him.

There was every reason, now, that he should be free and unshackled, to ascertain her whereabouts; for it had become the master-passion of his soul to see the poor persecuted heiress triumph over her enemies, and be placed in possession of her inalienable rights.

When that was done, he felt that he could resign himself to the tender mercies of that evil fortune which seemed to have beset him, but not till then.

One ray of consolation, however, found its way into his otherwise darkened soul.

Blueskin was free.

He had seen him.

By some means which he had yet to learn, he had been successful in getting out of Jonathan Wild's clutches.

He had, then, one powerful friend at liberty, who would use his whole exertions not only to freeing him, but also in finding Edgworth Bess.

From him he felt there was everything to hope.

So it will be seen that, desperate as his condition appeared to be, he did not despair.

But he made no attempt to get free from his bonds.

That, he was well aware, would be the work of many hours, and in a little while he would be visited.

There was one thing, however, that Jack did not know, but which, if he had, would have given him greater uneasiness than anything else.

In his dying moments—with his last breath, so to speak—surrounded by those who were ready to swear to his words, John Roots had solemnly declared that Jack Sheppard was his murderer.

Being in full possession of all the facts of the case, we know very well that he was not guilty of this crime, though John Roots undoubtedly laboured under the idea that he was, and had spoken in accordance with that conviction.

But, when all other things are reckoned, all will see how damaging and destructive this statement would be to him. By what means would he be able to prove his innocence? Who would believe his most solemn asseverations? No one.

Of this great peril he was, however, ignorant, and perhaps it was as well he was so—he was wretched enough already.

The five hours he had to wait passed laggingly enough in these gloomy meditations.

He was aroused from them at length, however, by hearing his cell door unlocked.

The governor and Mr. Skellum, accompanied by a posse of constables, entered.

In much the same fashion as they had been brought there, all three of the housebreakers were marched back to the lodge.

On reaching this place, the services of Mr. Groots were again called into requisition.

The irons which he had been at so much pains to rivet on were struck off.

A couple of hackney coaches were then called. Jack and his two comrades, with three police-officers, were stowed in one.

The governor and Mr. Skellum in the other.

It was in this manner, then, that Jack was taken to Bow-street, in order to have his examination before a magistrate.

He, as well as Flood and Blewitt, were securely handcuffed.

Jack was on the watch to take advantage of any little circumstance that might occur of a character that would tend to favour his escape, but none occurred, and his janitors were too much on the alert for him to make the least effort to save himself.

And so the court was reached.

It was very soon after ten when they arrived. Several little cases were on, and several more had to follow.

Jack and his two companions had to wait till the last.

Flood and Blewitt were taken in first.

Mr. Skellum stated the case to the magistrate in very few words.

The depositions were then taken.

The prisoners, who refused to say a word of any kind, were duly committed to take their trial at the next assizes, which would commence on the morrow.

Jack Sheppard had been kept separate, because there was a charge of a distinct and different nature to be brought against him.

As soon as Flood and Blewitt were removed, Jack was placed at the bar.

He did not glance around him at the crowd of idlers who thronged the court, but fixed his eyes upon the magistrate.

The clerk of the court, taken from a printed form, read over, in a mumbling voice, the charge against him.

The first witness who appeared in the box was Mr. Noakes, the governor, as the first count against Jack was his having broken out of prison.

He swore, of course, in the most positive manner as to his identity, and, at the same time, related all those events with which the reader is familiar, including, also, the death of the turnkey, Godfrey, who had been killed in consequence of Jack causing him to fall down a flight of stone steps.

Mr. Skellum next took his place.

In a clear and brevilquent manner he gave the magistrate a full relation of all the occurrences of the preceding night.

Among the rest was, of course, the dying declaration of John Roots.

At this intimation, coming so abruptly and unexpectedly as it did, Jack changed countenance.

He knew, of course, his perfect innocence of the crime thus imputed to him, and he was about to utter an indignant denial, but a second thought made him silent.

In it, however, he fancied he could trace the spirit of his master's malevolence towards him, but whether he was right or not in this is hard to tell. In all probability, John Roots believed that it was Jack who shot him.

The case, of course, excited the utmost attention, and Jack found himself the

Observed of all observers.

The clerk of the court took down Mr. Skellum's state-

ment in full, and, when this was done, two of the officers were called to give corroborative evidence.

This they did in a remarkably clear manner.

There was not in the crowded court one person who did not believe Jack guilty of the heinous crime of which he was accused.

After this, the usual question was put to the prisoner as to whether he had anything to say, or any questions to ask.

But Jack shook his head, and was silent.

He knew quite well that nothing he could say would tend in any way to dissipate his guilt, and perhaps his words would be construed in such a manner as to make him appear still worse.

Therefore he was wisely silent.

The magistrate took upon himself to make several remarks upon the case, and concluded by committing Jack to Newgate, as he had the other two.

He was then removed from the dock, but, as he descended, his eyes fell upon the countenance of one man, who stood near the door of the court.

It was lighted up with a demoniac smile of triumph and gratified revenge.

The face was one awful in the extreme to look upon.

The skin was black and scorched.

The hair singed.

The eyes bloodshot.

He nodded his head at Jack in a particularly disagreeable manner.

Jack knew him.

It was impossible for any one having once looked into that hideous physiognomy, to mistake it.

It was Jonathan Wild.

Jack had only a moment to glance at him, however.

But on his way from the dock to the door of the court, Jack noticed another face.

It was one which he fancied he had seen somewhere or other, but he could not recollect where.

He, too, nodded his head to him, but in a manner expressive of friendly feeling towards him.

Jack nodded in return, and then the door was closed behind him.

Once more was he securely pinioned, and led to the hackney-coach, which was waiting before the door of the court, and in which Flood and Blewitt were already seated.

In very much the same manner as he had been brought there, Jack was taken back to Newgate.

His reflections were of a peculiarly bitter turn, but, notwithstanding that, he had his eyes open to everything that was occurring around him, and in readiness to take advantage of anything he might see likely to serve him.

But there was none.

The fact of his having performed the unparalleled and hitherto disbelieved feat of breaking out of Newgate, caused them to be more than ordinarily watchful of him.

What would Edgworth Bess think, should she hear of what had taken place?

He felt that he should be for ever ruined in her estimation.

He felt his anger rise when his eye fell upon the two men who had been the chief means of bringing this trouble upon him.

Then he thought of Jonathan Wild, and a deep curse came from his lips, as he remembered that he was the primary cause of all the trouble he had known.

CHAPTER CLIX.

BLUESKIN AND STEGGS MATURE THEIR PLANS AGAINST WILD.

As Jack will be tolerably safe in Newgate for some time to come, we feel that we can leave him there for a time, and turn our attention to other personages in this eventful drama.

We have already hinted that Blueskin, after he parted with Steggs in the manner related in a former chapter, searched long and unsuccessfully for some trace of his young friend, Jack Sheppard.

In the manner he was dressed he felt pretty sure he should escape notice, unless, indeed, he was to come face to face with his old master, Jonathan Wild.

Then, indeed, his position would be a dangerous one;

out that was a remote contingency, and one that he would have to take care to guard against.

As a last hope, and not without considerable apprehension he had ventured into the "Black Lion."

It may, perhaps, be as well to state that, previous to this, he had been to the "Fountain," in Gilbert-passage, and there learned that Jack had called and inquired for him.

The landlord also imparted the additional intelligence that he had brought two more men with him, who, from the description given, Blueskin recognised at once.

From Johnson, at the "Black Lion," however, he got no information whatever.

Then, upon going down Wych-street in the direction of the Borough, for day was close at hand, he had seen the crowd in front of John Roots' house.

What took place from that time to when he looked into the window of the coach as it stopped opposite Newgate, we already know.

Blueskin's principal motive in following the coach, was to see whether Jack was really taken to the prison or to Jonathan Wild's house, and he could not help experiencing a certain amount of satisfaction when he found it was not the latter.

He was also desirous of letting Jack know that he was safe, and that his present whereabouts was known to him.

He imagined Jack would gather this much by the expression of his countenance.

He lingered until the ponderous lodge-door of the prison was closed, and then, without further delay, he separated himself from the throng of people.

But he had been observed by several, and, in order to avoid them, he hailed a hackney-coach which was passing by the top of the street and got into it, giving orders to be driven to the Borough.

By the time he reached this place it was broad daylight, and people began to make their appearance in the deserted thoroughfares.

The public-house was closed, and, not wishing to disturb the inhabitants, he made his way to the stables attached to it.

Here he found persons moving about, and, upon stating who he was, they permitted him to lie down on some hay in the loft.

He had not been long in this place before he fell fast asleep, nor did he awake until nearly nine o'clock.

Hastily descending the ladder, he crossed the yard and entered the house, the usual daily business of which had commenced.

Upon inquiry, he soon found his new friend Steggs.

A wonderful change had taken place in his appearance, more than one would believe could have been effected in so short a period.

In answer to his eager questions for intelligence, Blueskin told him all he knew.

"Come with me," he added, as he concluded. "He will certainly be taken before the magistrate this morning, in order to be committed to take his trial."

"It will be a case with him this time, I am afraid."

"Things look black, but still they may improve. Now, I should attend the examination myself, only I am afraid of being recognised. You would not run so much risk, because you are not so well known as I am."

"Well?"

"I want to know at once what takes place, because my future operations will greatly depend upon it."

"I see."

"I will go with you to the court, and wait somewhere for you while you are inside. Take particular notice of all that is said and done."

"I will."

"That is agreed, then. Let us start at once."

"But Jonathan Wild?"

"What of him?"

"Do you think he will be there?"

"I know not. I fancy, very likely he will, and yet I don't know. I could not hear anything of him while I was inquiring."

"Do you think he would recognise me?"

"No. I am sure he would not; you have so greatly altered, I should never have known you had it not been for your voice."

"I see, and Jonathan has no need to hear that."

"None at all; and, even supposing you are there, he will hardly notice you among the crowd."

"You have not forgotten the scheme I proposed to you?"

"No."

"I shall have to be very careful."

"You will, but we must defer talking about that until after we learn the result of the examination."

"I think I could find a disguise that would answer the purpose."

"I have no doubt you could, but then you never know what may happen, and I want to be quite sure. Would that I could discover some trace of Edgworth Bess."

"You have still been unsuccessful?"

"Quite. I cannot find any one who can give me any information respecting her."

"Then we must wait with patience, and see what the current of events will turn up."

"I cannot tell what more we can do, but come, if we do not start at once we shall be too late, for the court opens at ten."

"I am ready," said Steggs. "Which will be our best way?"

"By water will be the quickest and nearest."

"Good."

The pair sallied out from the inn, and quickly reached the river side, where they hired a boat to take them to the Savoy-steps.

At that period, of course, the river steamboats were unknown, and the journey was performed by light boats, or wherries as they were called, which were rowed by one man.

Nothing occurred during their transit from one bank of the river to the other deserving of particular notice.

The Savoy-steps were reached in a short time, for the tide was in their favour.

Landing, they made their way with all speed to Bow-street.

Upon arriving here, however, they found that the court had been open some time.

Blueskin, pursuant to an arrangement between them, stopped at a coffee-house in Russell-street, while Steggs went alone into the court-house.

He was allowed to pass unquestioned, and by degrees wormed himself into the densest part of the throng.

Here he watched and waited.

Presently, however, as his eyes were turned towards the door, he saw that person enter whose presence he above all things wished to shun.

Jonathan Wild.

Steggs did not, however, let his eyes rest upon him for a moment, lest the thief-taker should perceive him.

He stood in such a manner that his back was turned towards him.

Our readers must recollect that, though Steggs had to all appearance repented of the past, and turned the friend of those whom he had before assisted to persecute, yet he had a deep grudge against Jack Sheppard.

There are some natures so constituted that they can never forget or forgive an insult or an injury, and Steggs was one of these.

At first, therefore, when Jack was placed in the dock, he recollected the defeat he had met with at his hands, and he rejoiced at the peril of his situation.

But it was only for a few moments that he gave way to this feeling.

He stifled it.

With the greatest attention he listened to every word.

He involuntarily shook his head, as the details were one by one laid bare.

It was Steggs who had nodded in a friendly manner to Jack, as he was leaving the dock.

Then Jack, although he had only a confused recollection of his face, nodded again.

Steggs turned away instantly, and it was well he did so, for Jonathan Wild had observed the movement, and looked round like lightning to see what friend of Jack's was present.

He was unsuccessful, however, for Steggs had the back of his head towards him.

But he had another means of detection left.

Nothing would have pleased him better than to have made his way to the room in which Jack Sheppard was, but he controlled his inclination.

He wanted to know most who had nodded to him. Planting himself, then, against the doorway, he narrowly scrutinized everyone as they went out.

Jack's examination concluded the day's business, so all made a move to leave the court.

Steggs was not long before he perceived his enemy's manoeuvre.

He felt himself in a very awkward position.

To hold back, however, would only be to insure detection.

Perhaps, if he went with the stream, he would be unnoticed.

He fairly trembled, however, when he saw Wild's bloodshot eyes glaring around, and there were many others who were as uneasy as himself.

But for once chance favoured him.

He had taken care to place himself in the densest part of the crowd, and a considerable crush took place at the door.

In this crush Steggs dropped his hat.

It was done quite unintentionally, but he immediately availed himself of the incident.

He stooped down to pick it up, and, while doing so, managed to pass through the door.

He was unnoticed.

Once outside, he ran as fast as he could to the coffee-house, where he had agreed to meet Blueskin.

Then, having made him acquainted with all particulars, the two sat down and deliberated upon the scheme which Steggs had proposed, and the result of which was to be the total destruction of Jonathan Wild.

CHAPTER CLX.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE IMPARTS A PLEASANT PIECE OF INFORMATION TO JONATHAN WILD.

TIME, the unfold of all mysteries, will speedily reveal not only the nature of the plot against the thief-taker, but also the amount of success with which it is crowned.

Leaving, therefore, Blueskin and Steggs to arrange its minor details, we will go back a little.

After the destruction of "The Larches," Jonathan Wild had Edgworth Bess conveyed in a coach to Dover.

He stopped at a small but respectable inn, where the still insensible girl was placed in bed, and medical assistance immediately sent for.

An examination showed that although she had been scorched in many places, the burns were nearly all of a superficial, and none of a dangerous character.

Jonathan received the intelligence with much satisfaction.

He was in dread that after all his trouble he should lose her, and all his carefully-constructed plans would then be destroyed.

By his orders, the landlady of the house procured for Edgworth Bess a complete change of raiment, for those she had on were little better than tinders.

Jonathan himself, from the numberless wounds and burns he had received, stood greatly in need of medical treatment, but he disdained the idea altogether.

Besides he could not spare the time.

No sooner was he aware of Bess's safety, than leaving the inn, he hastened back to the burning ruins.

But the fire had reached its culminating point, when the roof fell in, and that in a great measure extinguished it.

All that now remained was a huge smouldering heap—in some places glowing red, in others emitting a dense black and suffocating smoke.

There was nothing to be gained by standing there and watching, Wild thought, so he called to his men to follow him away.

Little did he think how large an amount of booty he would have gained had he taken the trouble to sit the ashes.

The greater portion of his band was with him, but there were others in the cavern below, to which Wild directed those men who had landed to lead him.

It was reached in a very short time afterwards.

The destruction of the pirate band had been complete.

Upon issuing the order that all the dead should be left upon the ground, and the wounded led out as prisoners, only five wretched-looking objects could be found.

They were all who remained of the much-dreaded pirate band.

These Jonathan had securely bound, placed in the boats, and rowed ashore.

His own men were all terribly fatigued, and many of them had received hurts of such a character as precluded their immediate removal from where they were.

Jonathan himself, however, determined not to stay, and accordingly as soon as he had made those arrangements which he could not avoid staying to do, he ordered a carriage, and set out for London, taking Edgworth Bess with him.

The poor girl was hardly in a fit state to be removed, but Jonathan did not feel safe with her unless she was within his own house in Newgate-street.

The doctor, however, had told him that no particular harm would result from the journey, but advised him not to take it unless circumstances made it imperative.

This was enough for Wild to set off without delay.

How he reached Newgate-street we have already seen.

"Tonks!" he cried, as soon as that individual had closed the door behind him.

"Yes, Mr. Wild!"

"Send some one for Mr. Snoxall at once."

"Yes, sir!"

"And when he comes, let him wait for me."

Still holding Bess in his arms, who had been in a strange death-like trance during the whole of the journey, and which may be attributed to fright and exhaustion, Jonathan crossed the hall, and though the effort was almost beyond his strength, carried her up two flights of stairs.

Then, pushing open a door which was only partially closed, he entered a room which the dim and ghostlike light of early morning, as it struggled through the window, showed to be furnished as a bed-chamber.

As carefully as possible, Jonathan laid the poor heiress upon the bed.

He felt his heart sicken with dread as he gazed upon her pallid countenance, which seemed like that of a corpse.

Should she die, farewell to the daring, ambitious dream with which he had indulged his fancy.

His policy now was to take as much pains as he could to keep her alive.

When he had attained his ends, when the broad acres which owed the Doumulls as their owners were fairly his, she could die as soon as she pleased.

He should never trouble himself about her then.

Feeling that he could do nothing, and anxious for the arrival of the apothecary, who has already more than once made his appearance before the reader, Jonathan left the room, carefully locking the door after him.

He descended the stairs, and entered his office.

Upon the desk were a number of communications, but none of them of particular importance, or connected with this history.

In about a quarter of an hour, Mr. Snoxall arrived.

Without any circumlocution, Jonathan led him up into the bedroom.

"I leave this young girl in your care," he said; "recover her."

Mr. Snoxall felt her pulse.

Then shook his head.

The action increased Jonathan's alarm.

"She is very bad," remarked the chemist.

"Restore her to health," said the thief-taker, "and you shall have a hundred guineas for your pains; nay, two hundred if you will do it quickly."

"I will try my best," replied Mr. Snoxall. "She is in a very precarious state, and rest and medicine are absolutely necessary. Above all," he added, "there must be mental quietude, or what I do will be of slight avail."

"I leave her with you," said Jonathan. "Remember your reward."

With these words on his lips, he turned on his heel, and departed.

Scarcely, however, had he reached the ground floor of his abode, than he heard a loud summons for admittance.

Wondering who it could be, at that early hour, he stood where he was, and waited.

"Where's Mr. Wild?" asked a voice, which Jonathan immediately recognised.

It was that of Mr. Noakes, the governor of Newgate.

"Come in, sir," said Tonks, "he will be down directly."

"I am here," said Wild, as he stepped forward.

"Ah!" exclaimed the governor, "I have important news for you."



[JONATHAN WILD ENRAGES JACK SHEPPARD BY HIS TAUNTS.]

But the man bore the scrutiny unflinchingly.

The reader doubtless suspects who it was.

It was Steggs.

He had very carefully disguised himself—so carefully, indeed, that no one, not even Lord Donnull, could have recognised him.

The cringing manner he had assumed, partly because it was one that he could act without much difficulty, and partly because he considered he should best deceive Jonathan by it.

Wild did not know him.

Clever as he was in penetrating a disguise, that of Steggs baffled him.

He was careful, too, to change his voice.

"What do you want?" asked the thief-taker; "speak! I've no time to lose."

Steggs twirled the hat more rapidly between his fingers, and appeared confused.

"What do you want?" roared Wild, again.

"Mr. Wild!" stammered Steggs.

"Well!"

"You employ a goodish many men, sir."

"Ya—ah!"

"I am a poor fellow."

"Ya—ah!"

"I can't get no work."

"Ya—ah!"

"Mr. Wild, will you take me into your service? I am sure I'll serve you faithfully."

Jonathan was about to reply at once in the negative, but a sudden consideration induced him to alter his mind.

He looked still more keenly at his visitor.

Now was Steggs in danger.

The scheme he had proposed was, indeed, a bold one.

It was to enter Wild's service.

To profess himself to be his most devoted adherent.

To worm himself as much as he could into his secrets.

Then when he felt that he had him securely in his power.

When he felt that he could not escape.

Then he should turn against him.
Achieve his ruin.

But the scheme, bold and daring as it was, would not be very easy to carry out.

Jonathan was a man not easily to be deceived.

Should he discover the imposture, Steggs would have to suffer for it.

Jonathan Wild, although he had a great many men in his gang, was always careful not to engage one without he had evidence of his having committed a felony.

Then he could do just what he liked with him, because of his being able at any time to bring a charge against him.

Now Steggs was not liable to this.

But something about him—in all probability, his humble or rather servile manner—seemed to please him, and he felt inclined to waive this objection.

Besides, he thought it would not be long before he got a hold upon him of some sort or other.

The defection of Flood and Blewitt had, of course, made a vacancy in the number of his personal adherents.

The man before him desired to enter his employ.

He was ragged and starving, and he thought he should have some claim upon his gratitude—not that Wild ever had much idea of that, for in his own self he was almost a stranger to it.

"Are you willing to do my bidding?" he growled, looking fiercely upon Steggs. "It will be no child's play, I can tell you!"

"Try me, Mr. Wild," whimpered Steggs. "Give me a trial, do, sir! 'Oh! dear!'"

It was like the spider asking the fly to walk into his parlour only once.

"I will," said Jonathan, after a moment's consideration, "and you will find that if you will only do your duty you will have a good place, and earn heaps of money."

"Mr. Wild," said Steggs, "you will always find me to be your very humble servant on all occasions when I shall be of the slightest service to you."

"Don't say too much," growled the thief-taker. "Serve me faithfully. I am sick of the treachery of those around me, and wish to find some one in whom I can confide and rely. I shall put you on your trial, and if you try to play me false in any matter, you know the result."

"Oh! dear!"

"A ride to Tyburn, and a dance upon nothing."

"Oh! dear!"

"What makes you say, 'Oh! dear?'"

"It's a way I've got, Mr. Wild, that's all."

"Ya—ah!"

"May I consider the matter as settled, sir?"

"Yos. I shall keep a sharp eye upon your movements."

"And if you are satisfied, Mr. Wild?"

"You shall have nothing to grumble at."

"Thank you, sir. Oh! dear!"

Bang! bang! went Wild's cudgel on the desk.

Wilkinson appeared.

"This man has entered my service," said the thief-taker, in a disagreeable voice. "See that he is treated properly."

"Yeg, Mr. Wild. Oh! dear, yes, sir, of course."

Wilkinson was surprised.

But he did not dare show it.

Steggs followed him out.

As soon as he was alone, Jonathan resumed his meditations.

From the expression of his countenance, it might be gathered that they were of a particularly pleasing nature.

He was interrupted by his business, a detail of which would prove anything but pleasing to the reader.

At length, towards evening, he put on his hat, and left his house, muttering as he did so.

"It will do me good to see him, and now I have had some work, why shouldn't I have some pleasure? Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER CLXII.

BLUESKIN, BY MEANS OF A HEAVY FEE, RETAINS THE SERVICES OF AN EMINENT LAWYER ON BEHALF OF JACK SHEPPARD.

IMMURED in one of the darkest, deepest, and strongest cells in Newgate, was Jack Sheppard.

It was far—very far indeed—beneath the surface, and a faint reflected light was all that illumined it.

The walls were slippery with moisture, and covered in many places with glittering exhalations of a nitry character, while on the floor the damp had collected in a number of tiny pools.

It was, in truth, as cheerless a place as could well have been imagined.

The little aperture near the roof, and which, for the want of a better appellation, we suppose we must call the window, was unglazed, and defended with strong iron bars.

It seemed almost a mockery to place them there, for what fettered prisoner would be able to climb up the smooth slippery stones, which afforded neither hand nor foothold.

The door which opened into the stone passage was of itself a masterpiece of strength.

It was plated on the inner side with sheet iron.

The frame of the door was also sheathed with iron.

That, indeed, seemed something through which it would be impossible to force a passage; but, beyond that, there was the stone corridor protected by just such another door, and many more, before the street could be reached.

What man was there, who, in the full possession of health and strength, and provided with every tool requisite for his purpose, who could have worked his way to freedom undetected?

We are not afraid to say no one.

But Jack Sheppard had no tools whatever.

He was fettered, too, in such a manner that no one could have got free from them.

Round his waist was a broad iron ring, weighing many pounds.

It was secured by a padlock.

A ring was fixed in one part of it, and through this a chain was linked, which was fastened at the other end to a large iron staple cemented in the stonework.

And not only this, but his ankles were encircled with iron rings, to which long links of chain were affixed, and riveted to his girdle.

Then his wrists were secured in a similar manner, except that the chain which connected them was formed of small links, and was not attached to the iron ring round his middle.

Thus loaded—for it is stated, upon good authority, that the aggregate weight of the fetters worn by him on this occasion exceeded two hundred and thirty pounds—he found it a matter of considerable difficulty to move at all.

Did not escape, then, seem out of the question?

It did; and even Jack lost all hope when he reflected upon the obstacles he would have to overcome before he could get free.

Gloomily, then, after he had been left to himself, he sat down upon the stone bench and thought.

And the more he thought the more he gave way to despair.

What the result of the morrow's proceedings would be, when he was put upon his trial, he already knew.

Was Jonathan Wild to triumph?

It seemed so.

Blueskin was at liberty, and doubtless would do all he could to serve him; but Jack was one of those who place but slight reliance upon the proceedings of others, preferring to depend upon his own.

And when he saw his inability to aid himself, it made him doubtful of the ability of others.

Slowly and wearily the hours wore away, but he made no movement.

He bent his head in sorrowful dejection.

What had been his life?

A brief and unhappy course, to meet with a violent termination.

His most bitter thought was the revulsion of feeling which Edgworth Bess would feel towards him upon hearing the account of the murder.

He had seen her for the last time, he thought; and, even should he, by some chance or other, regain his freedom, she would never treat him as she had formerly done.

This was hard, indeed, to bear, for, despite the difference there was in their position—or, rather, rank—he loved her with his whole heart.

The passion was a wayward one, no doubt. It could not be otherwise in such a fierce spirit, but, after his own fashion, he did love her.

It was not, however, that he ever thought of her becoming his wife. He looked up to her as being something as far above him as the stars, and, like them, only to be admired at a distance.

But, above all things, was he desirous of standing well in her opinion. He would gladly have gone through fire and water, or endured a thousand deaths to do her service; and a good word from her, or a smile of approbation, he would have felt to be an ample reward.

It must not be forgotten that the by far greater portion of Wild's enmity towards him was induced by his espousing the cause of the poor heiress. Had he consented to aid Wild in his iniquitous designs against her, he would have had the thief-taker on his side.

But it is questionable whether the enmity of such a man as Jonathan Wild was not preferable to his friendship.

Had he in reality been guilty of the heinous crime of which he had been accused, Jack would not have felt it half so much as he did. He almost felt that he could be content to die were that stigma removed from his name.

His ruminations were interrupted just as it was growing dusk, by the entrance of a jailor into the dungeon.

"Here's a visitor for you, Jack," he cried. "Walk in, sir, if you please."

Jack looked up eagerly.

His first thought was that it was Blueskin who had come to pay him this visit, and he was somewhat disappointed when he saw standing before him an individual whom he had certainly never seen before, and who his dress proclaimed to be a lawyer.

"Your name is Sheppard, I presume," he said, with a bow and a smile.

"Well, sir."

"I have been sent here."

"Indeed!"

"Allow me to say, in fact," added the lawyer, with a satisfied smile at his own wit.

"By whom have you been sent?" asked Jack, suspiciously, for he fancied in this he could detect some deep-laid scheme on the part of his arch-enemy. "By whom have you been sent?"

"I will tell you, Mr. Sheppard, for the gentleman who paid me my fee had an idea that you would mistrust me, and therefore put me in possession of a kind of password, if I may so speak, by which you might know it was to your own interest to speak freely to me."

"And what is it?"

"The name by which the gentleman is often called by those who are intimate with him, is Blueskin, on account of the colour of his face. By others he is called Mr. Joseph Blake. Neither of these, however, is his right name."

"I am aware of that," said Jack, "and so are fifty more."

"That may be, my dear sir, but don't be so impatient. He told me this much, and then said that you were the only person now living, save one, who knew his real name."

"That is quite true," replied Jack, whose suspicions began to dissipate. "But did he tell you his real name, in order to convince me that you were really sent by him?"

"He did."

"Then tell it me at once. I shall then have all the doubts I feel removed."

"The name is—"

"Say it in a whisper," cried Jack, interrupting him. "The turnkey may be listening, and I know he wants it kept from all such ears. Now tell me."

The lawyer put his mouth to Jack's ear.

"Stephen Ticknor."

"Enough," said Jack. "Such is, indeed, his real name, as he confided it to me. Did he say that it was known to but one other person besides myself?"

"Yes."

"I know to whom he alludes, and that person, although the name may be familiar to him, does not identify it with Blueskin."

"So much the better, then, my dear sir, as it forms a

sort of additional proof that I was really sent by him, and with the intention of doing you a service."

"It does. Tell me the particulars."

"Certainly, if you wish it, though time is precious, and I have much to say to you."

"Go on."

"To be sure. This morning, then, I was visited in my chambers in Lyon's Inn by this friend of yours, who gave me a highly satisfactory fee, and engaged my services to employ a counsel to defend you on your trial to-morrow."

Jack shook his head.

"I am afraid it will be of little use. The case is too clear against me."

"It does seem very so," replied the lawyer. "Your friend could not give me all the particulars, so I went to Bow-street to read over the depositions."

"Mr. —" said Jack, and he paused, for he did not know the name of his visitor.

"Cunningham," suggested the lawyer, blandly. "Mr. Jacob Cunningham."

Jack bowed.

"What I was about to say was this—I have an enemy."

"Ha!"

"An enemy, too, of no ordinary kind—an enemy above all to be dreaded."

"That is awkward."

"An enemy who is all powerful. He will appear against me, and it is notorious that, if ever he gives evidence against any one, that person is sure to be convicted."

"I can guess who you mean."

"Doubtless."

"The description is quite sufficient," said the lawyer.

"You mean Jonathan Wild."

CHAPTER CLXIII.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE AND JONATHAN WILD CONSULT TOGETHER AS TO THE BEST MEANS OF RENDERING MR. CUNNINGHAM'S SERVICES OF NO AVAIL.

"I do," said Jack. "He has been, and is, my evil genius. Through him my father was brought to the scaffold, and he has sworn, over and over again, that I shall die at the hangman's hands."

"I have heard," remarked the lawyer, "that one of his characteristics is, that, sooner or later, he never fails to keep his word."

"It is so," responded Jack, gloomily.

"But come—come," said Mr. Cunningham, "this won't do; it isn't business. Never mind Jonathan Wild just at present. We will decide what to do with him by and bye."

"You might spare yourself the trouble."

"Pho—pho—not all. I have been paid well, and I shall try my best to earn it. There is this about it, too: it would be a very glorious thing to overthrow Jonathan Wild—a very glorious thing indeed."

"No doubt."

"Then let us do our best. If we don't make an effort we are sure not to do it."

"But the case is so clear."

"Never mind that."

"And there are so many serious counts in the indictment, that it would be impossible for me to be acquitted on all of them."

"Stay—stay. Don't take things for granted quite so much. Listen to me."

"What is it?"

"Tell me, if you can, what counts there will be. Take a moment to reflect, and then tell me calmly."

Jack did so.

"The first," he said, "will no doubt be for committing a robbery at the residence of a Mr. Hadley."

"Hum," said the lawyer, as he made a note of the circumstance in a note-book which he produced; "and am I to consider that there is sufficient ground to support that count?"

"If you mean," said Jack, bluntly, "did I commit the burglary, I answer, yes."

"Oh! a burglary was it?"

"Yes."

"You said a robbery before."

"Did I?"

"Yes; and they are two rather different things, you

1. The first step is to identify the key components of the system. This involves understanding the inputs, outputs, and internal processes. For example, in a manufacturing system, the inputs might be raw materials and labor, the outputs might be finished products, and the internal processes might involve assembly and quality control.

"Who is coming?" he added.
His quick ear had caught the sound of a footstep.
Another moment, and there was a knock at the door.
"Come in!" roared the governor.
A turnkey appeared.
"If you please, sir, I've come to say, according to orders, that the lawyer has just left Jack Sheppard's cell."
"Very good," said the governor; "that will do."

CHAPTER CXLIV.

JONATHAN WILD TAUNTS JACK SHEPPARD, AND NEARLY PAYS FOR HIS PLEASANTRY WITH HIS LIFE.

JONATHAN WILD sprang to his feet as soon as the turnkey left.

"Mr. Noakes."
"What is it, Mr. Wild?"
"Have you a man about the place that you can trust?"
"I don't know. What is it to do?"
"Let some one follow the lawyer when he goes out, yet without seeming to do so."
"I see."
"And watch where he goes."
"That's it, Mr. Wild."
"We can make up our minds what to do when he comes back."

"So we can."
"Be off with you, then."
"I shall be too late, if I don't make haste."
Mr. Noakes precipitately left the room as he spoke, in order to send the spy upon his errand.

In a few minutes he returned.
"It's all right," he said.
"Can you depend upon the man you have sent?"
"I think so."
"Has he ever done a similar job for you before?"
"Oh! yes. The fact is, Mr. Wild, I've got rather a hold upon him."
"I see."

"So that he dares not be false to me, because, if he was, his life would be sure to pay the forfeit."
"Ha! ha! You understand that sort of thing, I perceive. There's nothing in the world like employing people who can't call their lives their own, but who feel they hold them entirely at your good pleasure."

"That is precisely my opinion, Mr. Wild, and I am glad to find that a similar one is entertained by you."
"Never mind compliments. What are we to do with this confounded lawyer?"

"Ay! that's it."
"He must be got out of the way."
"Exactly."
"What would be the best way of doing it?"
"That I should rather leave to your superior genius."
"Ya—ah! That will do! Suppose we were to make him drunk?"
"Yes."

"And then, when he was quite helpless, suppose we were to put him into a post-chaise, and have him driven fifty or sixty miles into the country, and left at some place where he would not be able to find a conveyance to return."

"Capital, Mr. Wild, capital, if it can only be done!"
"I have accomplished things that looked a great deal more difficult than that."

"I am aware of it, Mr. Wild."
"And I will do this, or I will never attempt anything again! You leave that part to me. Just let me know where he is to be found."

"I shall be able to do that."
"Then you need not trouble yourself any further."
"I quite understand, and then, if that is managed, Jack Sheppard's condemnation will follow as a matter of course."

"Mind he don't play you any trick and get off again. I should advise you to keep a sharp eye upon him. He seems to have a kind of faculty for prison-breaking."

"You need not alarm yourself, Mr. Wild. He is quite safe, and will be. Take my word for that. Why, at this present moment, he must be loaded with at least two hundred weight of iron."

Jonathan smiled grimly.
"His fetters did not give him much trouble the time

before, you must recollect. Don't trust too much to them, but keep a sharp eye upon him—that is the best thing you can do."

"Should you like to pay him a visit?"
"That was the very thing I came to do, only you asked me in here."

"Oh! ah! So it was. Well the lawyer has gone now, so you will find him disengaged."

"It will do me good to see him," said the thief-taker; "and why should not I? I have got a piece of news to give him, too, which will disturb his rest a little."

"Have you, indeed?"
"Yes, I shall settle him, don't fear, and by this time on Monday he will no longer be here to trouble us."

As he spoke, Jonathan went to the door of the room, and, on opening it, went out.

The governor followed.
A little passage communicated the lodge of Newgate with this room, and having traversed it, the governor said to one of the turnkeys—

"Take Mr. Wild to Jack Sheppard's cell."
The man rose to his feet, and prepared to do the governor's bidding.

Mr. Noakes did not attempt to follow the thief-taker to his victim's cell. He was afraid his presence would be considered an intrusion.

And Jonathan, he knew, amiable as he seemed disposed towards him, was the last man to brook anything of that sort.

Accordingly Wild stalked after the turnkey in solitude and silence, until he arrived at the door of the cell in which Jack Sheppard was confined.

He ran his eye over the complicated fastenings with something like satisfaction. He felt that there was little probability of even Jack's undoing them.

He noticed, too, its situation, and could not help giving the governor credit for the discretion he had exercised in selecting it.

After the lawyer had left him, Jack had sat down with a somewhat lightened heart.

Hope had once more become an inmate of his breast. He had but a slight knowledge of legal business, but he had often heard of its intricacies and chicanery.

Perhaps, he thought, a clever enough man might be found, who, by a skilful appeal to the jury, or by subversion of evidence, might procure his acquittal.

Certainly he did not look forward to the morrow's trial with the same amount of gloomy foreboding that he had done hitherto.

Before, however, he had indulged in these reflections for any great length of time, he was aroused by hearing the bolts withdrawn, and the lock of his cell-door shot back.

Curious, again, to know who should be his visitor, and thinking that most probably it was Mr. Cunningham who had returned, in consequence of having thought of some question he had omitted to ask, he rose to his feet, despite the difficulty he had to do so.

But, to his vexation and anger, his old, implacable foe, Jonathan Wild, stalked in.

For a moment or two this strange pair stood confronting each other in silence.

The cell door was closed, leaving them alone together. The thief-taker folded his arms leisurely over his chest, and then looked, with a sneering and triumphant smile, into the countenance of his helpless enemy.

Jack returned his gaze boldly and defiantly, and even in the deep gloom of the dungeon the fierce, burning hate which held a place in his heart, could be seen to blaze out in his eyes.

Jonathan saw it, and had it not been from his conviction that while he stood where he was the prisoner could not reach him, he would have drawn back several paces.

Some time had now elapsed, as, doubtless, the reader will remember, since those who now stood glaring upon each other had met face to face.

How long the silence would have continued it would be hard to say. Jack had determined not to be the first to speak.

At length Jonathan gave utterance to that strange and awfully diabolical laugh of his which would almost have sent a weak-nerved person into fits at once.

"Ha! ha!"
The sound ceased even more abruptly than it commenced.

Nothing more unmirthful could well be imagined.

There was no movement of the facial muscles, as there always is in genuine, and usually in simulated, laughter. The same expression of feature was preserved, and the sound produced by simply opening the teeth a little way, and suddenly expiring breath.

Jack Sheppard shuddered imperceptibly as it grazed upon his hearing.

It sounded in his ears like the mocking laughter of fiends.

"So you're safe again, Master Jack," said Wild, after another, but shorter pause. "Your lodgings are not very comfortable, but then you have one consolation, you won't have long to put up with them. Ha! he!"

Again came that horrible laugh.

It seemed to freeze the blood in Jack's veins.

But he took no notice of Wild's words, he only gazed yet more fiercely upon him.

"Had a lawyer in to see you, I hear. I hope he will be successful in getting you off, but I am going to appear against you myself, and you know what that means, I dare say."

Still Jack made no reply.

His silence enraged the thief-taker more than he would have liked to confess.

It was only by an effort that Jack maintained his composure.

"You won't speak, won't you!" continued Wild, sneeringly. "Ah! well, as you like, it don't matter to me, but I could tell you something that would make you open your mouth, or I am mistaken."

Jack felt, as might be expected, a strong desire to know what his foe alluded to, but still he persisted in his determination not to speak.

"Never mind, my fine fellow, you'll ask me just now, and then I shall have my revenge upon you. Jack, you're doomed! You may have got some false hopes or other from your lawyer; they always misrepresent facts. There is no hope of escape for you! You will as surely swing at Tyburn next Monday as the sun will rise upon that day!"

Another pause.

"I shall come and see the show, and I shall take care to bring another with me to witness it. To be sure, she is in rather a delicate state of health, owing to the way she has been knocked about lately. But by Monday she will be well enough to accompany me, and I shall take care she does so."

"Who?" roared Jack, hoarsely, though he scarcely required to be told. "Who?"

"So you have spoken at last, eh? That was the charm that had power to loosen your tongue. I thought I should be able to do so, if I had a little patience. Ha! ha! Can't you guess, Jack, who it is? I am sure you can, if you try. It's your old sweetheart, Edgworth Bess—my wife, that is to be. She has promised, and it's all arranged. She's at my house waiting for me now. You wouldn't believe how loving she has got. She!"

"Liar!" yelled Jack, "har!"

CHAPTER CLXV.

JONATHAN WILD HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE FROM JACK SHEPPARD, BUT IS RESCUED BY HIS FRIEND, THE GOVERNOR.

As he uttered these words, which he did with extraordinary vehemence, Jack seized his manacles near their junction with his wrists, and, swinging the massive chains over his head, aimed a tremendous blow at his tormentor.

Jonathan had succeeded in his object of arousing Jack's passion.

He was pleased accordingly, and sought to aggravate him still more.

He thought, however, that where he stood Jack could not reach to harm him.

But in this he was deceived.

The heavy fetters came down with fearful violence upon his right hand.

The pain was great—so great, indeed, as to extort a yell from his lips.

Ere, however, it had died away upon his lips, he sprang forward with the intention of strangling Jack, so greatly did the pain from the blow inflame his passion.

But Jack saw him coming, and stepping back a pace or

two, he swung the fetters once more in the air, and this time brought them down upon Jonathan's head.

An enormous crack was the result.

But Jonathan's skull was not made of very tender stuff, or it would have given way long ago under the blows it had received.

He was half stunned, however.

He staggered.

But before Jack had time to give him another blow, he closed with him.

Jack lost his footing immediately.

Upon equal terms Jonathan weighed at least thrice as much as he did, and now he was incumbered with the iron work, he stood no chance at all.

It was impossible for him to keep his feet.

In his rage, Jonathan evidently forgot the elaborate plan of revenge he had concocted against him, and which had so nearly reached a consummation.

He was intent only upon putting his enemy to death.

When down, however, Jack grappled firmly with him.

A great noise, of course, had taken place, and still continued.

It reached the ears of the turnkey without.

He just gave one glance at what was taking place, and then hurried off to spread the alarm.

In less than a moment he returned with several of his mates and the governor of Newgate himself, by whose orders the frantic combatants were parted.

But the separation was not effected without a great deal of trouble.

When accomplished, both looked very much the worse for the encounter.

As for Jack, he lay almost in a state of insensibility, and he was allowed to do the best he could for himself, for, of course, Mr. Noakes had every attention paid to his villainous friend.

In addition to the blow upon his right hand and arm, and the one on the head, which had been given by the fetters, Jonathan had received a number of scratches and contusions.

"Brandy!" he yelled, as soon as he recovered the use of his voice; "brandy, I say! Curse you all—brandy! It's in my coat pocket, I tell you!"

Jonathan spoke as though he had mentioned this circumstance before, but the hint was quite enough, so the turnkey put his hand in the pocket, and brought forth a tolerable-sized flask.

As soon as he caught sight of it, Jonathan clutched at it with his left and uninjured hand, and, carrying it to his lips, did not move it again while a spot of the contents remained.

Then he flung it down on the dungeon floor with a shout, and had not the turnkey, kept a firm hold upon him he would have again sprang upon Jack, defenceless as he was.

It was at this moment, as it so happened, that Sheppard recovered himself sufficiently to sit up and look around.

The governor approached the thief-taker and whispered—

"Come, come, Mr. Wild, do not let us have any more of this; remember, I shall get into trouble. Only wait till to-morrow, and then all will be well."

"Ha! ha!" said Jonathan, in shrieking tones. "Of course, to-morrow. He will be sentenced to-morrow, and on Monday he will swing at Tyburn, as his father did before him. I had forgotten that. Ah! a thousand curses!"

Jonathan had forgotten something else.

That was his arm.

But pain soon reminded him of it.

His fury rose again, and imprecations of so terrible of a nature came from his lips, that the very turnkeys, used as they were to that sort of thing, fairly trembled.

"Call back your words," screamed Jack, vainly endeavouring to regain his feet. "Call back your words. Admit that you lied when you spoke to me."

"That touches you, does it?" said Jonathan, who, after his storm of curses had begun to subside into a calm. "You shall smart for this. It is one more score against you, which will be wiped off at the same time as the others."

"Call back your words," again cried Jack, who, finding he could not rise to a standing posture, had crawled as far towards his enemy as the chain by which he was

fastened to the floor would allow him. "Tell me what you said was false."

"It is true!" screamed Wild, "it is true! You wondered where she was, no doubt, and so did I. But I have found her, Jack—the thing which you failed to do. I made her a prisoner, and she is at this moment in my house, which she will leave for the first time, under my escort, to witness your execution!"

"It is false!" cried Jack, "false as your own heart. and I am a fool to place any credence in what you say. I might have guessed your object was to make my confinement as bitter as possible, but you have overshot the mark."

"You can disbelieve me, if you choose. You can fill yourself up with the idea that she is in some place of safety. But on Monday, Jack, you will be undeceived, for you will see her under my protection at Tyburn."

Jack fairly howled with rage. He tried in vain to articulate his words.

The governor of Newgate here interfered, and, after a little trouble, persuaded Jonathan to leave the cell.

No one cast a glance upon poor Jack.

The ponderous door was closed and locked, and he was left to his own reflections.

Painfully, and after repeated struggles, he got up off the floor, and seated himself upon the low stone bench, which served alike for chair and bed.

"What shall I do?" he groaned, not with the pain of the hurts he had received, but in deep agony of spirit. "What shall I do to save her? Can it be possible that her evil fortune is so much in the ascendant as to have placed her once more in that villain's hands! I will not, cannot believe it!"

He wiped the blood and perspiration from his face as he spoke.

"I had the miscreant in my power," he said. "Would that I could have maintained my advantage, or been armed with a knife, which I could have sheathed in his heart. I should then at least have had the consolation that Edgworth Bess had one enemy the less, and I almost think I should have been willing to die!"

A sudden pain made him utter a faint cry and cease speaking.

Wild had mauled him dreadfully.

The irons had bruised his body at every turn.

"Can it be really true?" he asked himself again.

"Would that I could see Blueskin, or find some means of communicating with him, but there is no hopes of my doing that—none at all! I must remain where I am, alternately awayed by hopes and fears. If she is really a prisoner in his hands, heaven help her, for she has need of it! Her peril is of no ordinary character."

He paused again.

"Would I was free!" he cried, "would I was free! I should not care then. Can these bolts and links confine me? No! I will be free! I will save her!"

As he spoke, he made a desperate effort to break away from his fetters by main force, but his own sense ought to have shown him the futility of making such an attempt as that.

The strong iron yielded not in the least, but cast him back more bruised and strengthless than before.

He lay for a little while utterly exhausted, and unable to move hand or foot.

Then a partial state of insensibility ensued.

It would have been a mercy had it been perfect.

No one came to visit him.

At the appointed hour, the man whose duty it was to supply the prisoners with food, opened the door a little way, and brought a loaf and pitcher of water into the cell, and then went away.

Darker and darker grew the cell as the fair and beautiful daylight faded away, until at last it became impossible to distinguish anything in it.

Then Jack roused a little.

Doubtless the cold air which swept in was the cause.

He resumed his old seat.

His limbs, however were stiff and cramped.

Then once again he began to think.

He made no attempt to lie down or to sleep; the latter, he felt, would be utterly impossible.

And so he remained through the long, weary hours of the night, listening to the lapse of time as it was noted by the clock in the belfry of St. Sepulchre's.

At length, towards morning, he fell into a kind of doze, produced by exhaustion more than anything else.

From this he was awakened by the entrance of several persons towards morning.

His irons were taken off, and he was allowed to wash his face, and make himself otherwise presentable.

Then some more routine was gone through, which it is hardly worth while to trouble the reader in detail with.

Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes had so managed, that his trial should take place very early in the morning of the first day of the sessions.

Their motive for this will presently be made apparent, if it is not already guessed at by the reader.

Flood and Blewitt were, of course, brought into the dock upon a charge of burglary and murder, and Jack Sheppard was placed along with them.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

IN WHICH JACK SHEPPARD IS PLACED AT THE BAR OF THE OLD BAILEY, TO TAKE HIS TRIAL FOR THE MURDER OF JOHN ROOTS.

THE court was very full.

That was the first thing that struck Jack, after giving a hasty glance around.

He then began to look more particularly.

His two companions—if such they should be called—stood with sullen mien and doggedly ferocious countenances, awaiting the pronouncement of that doom which they knew it would be impossible for them to avoid.

Should the present charge fail of substantiation, Jonathan Wild, they knew, would be prepared with another.

From these, Jack looked among the crowd of white-wigged barristers before him, and made a vain endeavour to distinguish Mr. Cunningham amongst them.

He was not there.

Alas! there was every reason to fear that the thief-taker had succeeded in carrying out the scheme he had prepared.

Then Jack looked in the faces of the spectators, in the hope that among them he should find one, at least, which he should recognise as belonging to a friend.

But this hope was disappointed.

He was aroused from this occupation by hearing the harsh, cracked voice of the clerk of the arraigns, as that individual began to read the indictment.

Jack tried at first to comprehend it, but, finding it was totally beyond his power, he again looked at his surroundings.

One judge was on the bench.

He was a stranger to Jack.

On his left hand was the jury-box; but, in the cold and apathetic-looking faces which they all, without exception, wore, he could gather nothing reassuring.

But, happening to glance down where several of the prison officials were standing, he perceived his two greatest enemies, the governor of Newgate and Jonathan Wild.

Jonathan looked up at him with a triumphant smile.

His face still bore the marks of the preceding evening's contest, and his right arm was carried in a sling.

So absorbed was Jack with the contemplation of his hideous physiognomy—or rather, so fascinated did he seem to be by the thief-taker's basilisk gaze, that he did not notice the clerk of the arraigns had finished reading the indictment, and that the court was waiting for him to plead, until a turnkey touched him on the arm and reminded him of it.

He found that the eyes of all present, spectators, jury, witnesses, judge, were upon him—but, nevertheless, he subdued the embarrassment he felt, and replied in a clear, calm voice—

"Not guilty!"

The plea was entered, and then the trial actually begun.

The Crown prosecuted.

The Attorney-General rose to state the case to the jury.

He paused a moment, and arranged his robes, while the slight bustle and confusion in the court subsided to perfect silence.

This was soon obtained, for upon the faces of the spectators generally was an expression of deep interest.

They had heard already some particulars of the case, and longed for fuller details.

One of the junior counsel at the table now handed the Attorney-General a brief, and he commenced his address as follows:—

"My Lord, and gentlemen of the jury,

"Three men—one so young as scarcely to have earned the title—now stand before you at the bar of this court, to answer to a charge, the penalty of which, if it be substantiated, is death by the hands of the executioner.

"Ample evidence will be laid before you, as to the particulars of the crime, but before the several witnesses are called, I feel it to be my duty to call your attention to one or two circumstances of a very important nature.

"In the first place, though all three of the prisoners are charged in the indictment with the crime of murder, with *malice prepense*, and though they were unquestionably all three concerned in it, yet evidence will be given which will tend to fix the onus of the guilt upon one of the prisoners only, and absolve the others from it.

"At least the evidence will serve to show by whose hand the deed was actually committed, though, as I need scarcely tell you, the other two standing by were accessories, and are equally guilty in the eyes of the law.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I shall now lay before you a plain statement of facts, after which I shall proceed to call witnesses, who will depose to the truth of what I advance.

"In Wych-street, in the Strand, near the church of St. Clement's Danes, there resided for many years a worthy and respected inhabitant of this great city, by name John Roots, and by profession a carpenter.

"About six or seven years ago this said John Roots took into his service, as apprentice, one John Sheppard, the youngest of the three prisoners at the bar.

"It was an act of charity and benevolence upon his part to take this lad and put a trade into his hands, for he did not receive, as is usually the case, any premium with him.

"There is another circumstance, too, which places the conduct of the carpenter in a more estimable light. The father of this John Sheppard was a notoriously bad character, and, after a brief course of villainy, expiated his crimes at Tyburn.

"I will not say that it is just or right, but certain it is that the consequences of a crime always fall upon the son of the perpetrator, and so it was in this instance.

"Few people in the city of London, knowing the antecedents of this misguided young man, would have ventured to take him into their service.

"But John Roots generously and magnanimously waived this objection.

"Soon, however, to his deep and infinite regret, he found that his kind-heartedness was misplaced—thrown away, in fact—for the apprentice proved to him a perpetual trouble and annoyance.

"Still he thought he might be able to train his plastic spirit and curb his vicious temper, but he found all his efforts unavailing.

"The heaven of evil was in him, and it worked out, nor could its progress be stayed.

"It will be out of my province to relate all that took place. Let it suffice to say that on the night of the tenth day of August last, John Roots sat up until a late hour for his recalcitrant apprentice, and at length, wearied out, went to bed.

"He was awoke by hearing a furious hubbub in the street, and, upon going to the window, he found it was caused by this Jack Sheppard, who, maddened by drink, was reviling his kind and indulgent master, and uttering most diabolical threats of vengeance.

"From this time John Roots lost sight of the unworthy object of his bounty, but the police soon heard of his exploits, for he turned housebreaker at once, associating himself with one Joseph Blake, against whom a warrant has been issued.

"The house of a highly respectable gentleman, named Hadley, was selected for the scene of their first exploit, and from which they succeeded in taking a considerable booty.

"Mr. Hadley was fired at by one of the burglars, it does not appear which, and was severely wounded.

"That active and enterprising officer, however, who has recently increased his claim upon the gratitude of the public by exterminating, first a nest of coiners, and

afterwards a band of ferocious pirates, took the matter hand, and in a little while caught Sheppard, and lodged him in Newgate.

"He was placed in a cell and heavily ironed, by the instructions of Jonathan Wild, who declared him to be a most desperate character.

"It seems almost beyond belief, but it is unquestionably true, that, by some means or other, the prisoner managed to free himself from his fetters, and, by digging under the door of the cell, made his way into the outer passage.

"It is supposed, for there is no witness of this transaction, that Sheppard met one of the turnkeys, Godfrey by name, and, taking him somehow at a disadvantage, dashed his brains out. At all events, the body of the officer was found shortly afterwards in that condition.

"From prudential motives, we decline to give any minute details of his escape. In a word, although it was deemed an impossibility, this youth contrived to get from the strongest prison in England."

The counsel paused for a moment, in order to regain his breath, while Jack found himself the universal object of the public gaze.

It is a most uncomfortable feeling to have the eyes of hundreds of people fixed upon your face, and Jack found it to be so.

But the counsel hastened to resume his address, which he had already extended to rather an unusual length.

"Upon making his escape, one would have thought he would have abandoned his evil course of life; but no, quite the reverse, for, in a day or two afterwards, he and this same Joseph Blake committed a highway robbery on the Dover-road.

"Jonathan Wild, whose zeal in the pursuit of criminals of all descriptions never abates, as soon as he learned the particulars of the escape, set out after the fugitives, and was fortunate enough to secure both upon Blackfriars' bridge.

"I am scarcely right here. Blake was not captured. He sprang over the parapet into the river, and though Mr. Wild chased him for some time in a boat, he was unable to capture him.

"Sheppard, however, was left upon the bridge, in charge of the two men who now stand beside him at the bar.

"What took place between them can only be surmised, but it appears pretty clear that, by holding out some inducement or other, Sheppard succeeded in making the two men false to their trust.

"Immediately, as I may say, after this, the three villains directed their steps to the house of Mr. John Roots, and there committed a burglary.

"Of the heinousness of this crime, so black with ingratitude as it was, I shall not say a word. Some things are best and most forcibly described by silence.

"The house was entered and robbed. The master of it, as is supposed, was aroused by the noise, and, going to the head of the stairs, raised an alarm."

CHAPTER CLXVII.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION CONCLUDES HIS ADDRESS TO THE JURY, AND THE FIRST WITNESS IS CALLED.

"THAT sound proved, gentlemen of the jury, to be his death-warrant.

"He was shot with a pistol, and fell down the staircase.

"But the officers of justice, who had been on the lookout for Sheppard near this spot, heard the alarm which was raised, and hastened to the residence of the carpenter, round the front door of which several watchmen and a crowd of persons were collected.

"The door was found to be fastened, and, as admission was denied them, the police-officers, under the orders of their inspector, Mr. Skellum, proceeded to break it down, and effect a forcible entry.

"No sooner was the door broken down, gentlemen of the jury, than, with a boldness that cannot but be wondered at, the three prisoners made a vigorous rush, and tried to force their way through the crowd.

"So unexpected was this attack, that they very nearly succeeded in getting off, but, luckily for the welfare of society, these depredators were beaten back, secured, and lodged in Newgate.

"On entering the house, the unfortunate tradesman,



[JACK SHEPPARD, BY THE AID OF HIS FRIENDS, MAKES A SECOND ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.]

Mr. Roots, was found by inspector Skellum and his men weltering in his blood at the bottom of the staircase.

"It was found that he was not yet dead, so, having raised him to a sitting posture, they asked him for the name of his murderer.

"He made several unsuccessful attempts to speak, and at last managed to gasp out two words, which were, however, clearly articulated, and Inspector Skellum and the men who stood near him are ready to take their oaths what those two words were.

"Those two words, gentlemen of the jury, composed a name.

"And that name was Jack Sheppard—the name of the youngest prisoner at the bar."

Again the prosecuting counsel paused, and made a reference to the bundle of papers he held in his hands.

Again did Jack find himself the object of universal attention, and this time he could see, owing to the manner in which the charge was made against him, that very little, if any, popular sympathy was on his side.

More than once during the counsel's address, an indignant denial of the facts there stated rose to his lips, but, each time that he would have spoken, he fortunately managed to control himself.

He remembered the words of his lawyer, Mr. Cunningham, that he was on no account to speak, and, although he could not see that gentleman anywhere in the court, he resolved, let what would be the temptation, to obey him.

The counsel spoke again.

"Such, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, is the case against the youngest prisoner at the bar. I have dwelt rather fully upon it, and may incur from some the charge of prolixity, but I wished to give, if possible, a brief but clear relation of all the facts concerned, in order that you, my lord, and you, gentlemen of the jury, might all the more readily come to a decision, and, if I succeed in doing this, I shall certainly be held guiltless of unnecessarily taking up the time of the court.

"To dwell upon any of the features of this case would

be supererogation. I cannot help expressing a belief that it would be impossible to find in the annals of criminal jurisprudence an instance of blacker ingratitude, treachery, and wickedness than that of this unhappy young man.

"He has scarcely passed the frontiers of manhood, and yet we see him burdened with a life time of crimes. Young as he is, three persons have received their death at his hands.

"And now, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I must conclude by directing your attention to the two other prisoners.

"As you will have already perceived, the case against them is included in the one implicating Sheppard.

"They suffered themselves to be lured by his specious promises and representations.

"They suffered themselves to be led into crime by him.

"They were captured in the very act of escaping from the very house where the burglary and murder had been committed, and upon their persons was found the principal portion of the booty, which has been identified as belonging to John Roots.

"Such, gentlemen of the jury, is the case for the prosecution, and the only thing that now remains for me to do, is to call the several witnesses who are in attendance here to-day to give their evidence, after hearing which I shall be able to leave it in your hands for decision, and, if the prisoners can be found not guilty of the crimes with which they are accused, then no one will rejoice or be more glad than myself, for it is always a disagreeable duty to bring accusations against a man.

"But if, on the other hand, gentlemen of the jury, you should be of opinion that the evidence I am going to produce is of such a character as to fix the impression of their guilt upon your minds, then I will call upon you in the name of justice, and those bonds by which society is linked together, not to shrink, disagreeable though it may be, from returning a verdict in concordance with that impression, in order that the strict letter of the law may be carried out, and in order that others may be deterred by witnessing their deplorable fate from acting in a similar manner."

The counsel for the prosecution sat down.

By means of his artfully-woven address, he had managed to turn the tide of popular favour against Jack and his companions, who were now regarded with positive loathing and abhorrence by the whole of the spectators.

A conviction of the guilt of all three had been forced upon the minds of all.

There was something terribly circumstantial about the whole of the details, and, if the evidence tallied with the statements of the counsel for the prosecution, then it would be impossible for any one to entertain the shadow of a doubt as to their guilt.

Jack's anxiety increased.

As he looked round and round the court, attentively scanning each face, the hopes which Mr. Cunningham had caused to spring up in his breast faded one by one away.

He was not there.

How was it?

Jonathan Wild's face that moment came within the sphere of his vision.

The thief-taker fixed his eyes exultingly upon him.

There was upon his face a look of triumphant malignity and satisfaction such as would have befitted the countenance of the arch fiend himself.

In a moment Jack connected the non-appearance of his lawyer and the triumphant expression of the thief-taker's face, and his heart sank still lower within him.

Silence was now cried, and then one of the junior counsel got up to call the witnesses.

But before he spoke, the judge, who had been rapidly taking notes of the main facts in the address of the counsel for the prosecution, looked up, and adjusting his spectacles, asked—

"Who appears for the prisoners?"

The question met with no response.

Then one of the ushers repeated the question in a low tone of voice.

Flood and Blewitt shook their heads to imply that no one had been employed by them.

"Some one has been retained to defend me, I believe, but I do not see the gentlemen here."

"Who was it?"

"Mr. Cunningham."

"But he is a lawyer. Oh! I suppose he was to instruct the counsel?"

"I think that's it."

"Then shall I call Mr. Cunningham?"

"Yes, if you please."

"Who appears on behalf of the prisoner?" again asked the judge.

"The two prisoners, Flood and Blewitt, my lord, are undefended, and the youngest has employed Mr. Cunningham to instruct counsel."

"Where is Mr. Cunningham? Is he in court?"

"Mr. Cunningham!" shouted the usher.

But there was still no reply.

The name was taken up outside, and repeated all over the building.

There was, however, no response made.

"Mr. Cunningham does not appear to be in court, my lord."

"Then the business must go on without him. Perhaps some one will watch the case."

A young man rose, and sat down again.

The action was considered sufficient.

When Jack found that Mr. Cunningham was not present, the little hope that held precariously to his heart deserted him utterly.

He had no chance now.

The junior counsel, who had risen to call the witnesses, now cried—

"Simon Gnof!"

"Here," said a wheezy voice, and a man elbowed his way into the witness-box, where he was duly sworn.

"Is your name Simon Gnof?" asked the junior counsel.

"Yes, your honour."

"What are you?"

"A watchman, your honour."

"You need not say your honour every time you reply to me, but simply answer my questions."

"Yes, your honour."

The counsel smiled, and so did most in the court.

"You are a watchman, you say. Where is your beat?"

"From the railings round St. Clement's-church to the corner of Newcastle-street, your honour."

"That will do. Now, can you tell me what took place on the night of the tenth of August?"

"Yes, your honour."

"Do so, then."

"It was just turned of midnight, and as I was a coming round the church railings, I heard some one a making a noise in Wych-street. Up I goes, and there I finds Mr. Roots' apprentice a shaking his fists, and swearing he'd be revenged on his master."

"What next?"

"I went to take him up, your honour."

"Well?"

"And then he knocked me down."

"Knocked you down?"

"Yes, your honour."

There was a general laugh at this, for the watchman was a great bony giant, six feet high at least, by whose side Jack Sheppard looked a pigmy.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD, IN A MOST ARTFUL MANNER, GIVES HIS EVIDENCE AGAINST JACK SHEPPARD.

"SILENCE!" cried the usher. "Si—lence!"

"Can you point out the person who knocked you down?" asked the junior counsel, as soon as the laugh had subsided.

"To be sure I can, your honour. It was young Jack Sheppard. Lor' bless you, I've knowed him years. There he stands."

"Will you point him out, and swear positively that he was the person you heard vowing to be revenged upon Mr. Roots the carpenter?"

"Yes, your honour."

The usher, who was standing near the witness-box, handed the watchman his long white wand, with which he pointed full at Jack Sheppard.

"That will do," said the young counsel. "You can stand down."

Mr. Gnoff descended from his elevated position, the counsel who had accepted the duty of watching the case not deeming it necessary to put any further questions to him.

"Call Jonathan Wild!" cried the counsel.

"Jonathan Wild!" repeated the usher.

In obedience to this call, the celebrated thier-taker, with an assumption of great humbleness, took his place in the witness-box, and when he took the oath, kissed the book in rather an ostentatious manner.

Then he looked round the court in what he fancied was a very amiable way, and made a deep circular bow to the assemblage generally.

"Your name is Jonathan Wild, I presume?"

"It is, sir," said Wild, in such a different tone of voice, that Jack Sheppard could hardly believe it was his enemy who had spoken.

"Do you know the prisoners at the bar?"

Before he replied, Jonathan pretended it was necessary for him to scrutinize all three very attentively.

"Yes," he said, at length, with great deliberation.

"Yes, I know them all three."

"Oh! very good, then, perhaps you would have no objection to tell the court what do you know about them."

"Certainly not!"

"Stay a moment, Mr. Wild!" said the judge, "I would take notes of what you say?"

"Very good, my lord!"

"Now, go on."

"Yes, my lord! the prisoner nearest to me is, I believe, named Matthew Flood!"

"Matthew Flood!" repeated the judge, as he wrote the name.

"He was employed by me as a kind of supernumerary police-officer. The same may be said of the man standing next to him, who calls himself William Blewitt!"

"Very good, Mr. Wild, that will do. Now, what about the other?"

"Jack Sheppard?"

"If that is his name!"

"I believe it is, sir!"

"What information can you give the court concerning him?"

"A great deal, sir, I am sorry to say, and none that will redound to his credit."

"Confine yourself to particularities, if you please, Mr. Wild."

"Certainly, sir. I have known the prisoner from his childhood. I knew his father too."

"Hold!" shouted Jack, who could restrain himself no longer. "Hold! I say, mention not his name."

"This interruption is very unseemly on your part, young man," said the judge. "Be silent, sir."

"We will not mention his father," said Wild. "I was, however, merely going to observe that he was a notorious highwayman, and suffered at Tyburn about twenty years ago."

Jonathan had gained his point.

That little bit of family history, he imagined, would tell well with the jury.

Nor were his calculations far wrong.

The judge took a note of it.

The jury exchanged looks, and whispered with each other, and apparently made a note of it also.

"Now, Mr. Wild, what can you tell us about the prisoner at the bar?"

"The first I heard of him was in consequence of a burglary, committed at the house of a highly respectable gentleman, named Hadley, which I traced to him and a man, named Joseph Blake, whom I had dismissed from my employ."

"What next?"

"I chased both from one place to another, till at last I came up with them at a ruined abbey on the borders of Gloucestershire, where I captured Sheppard after a most desperate resistance, which resulted in the death of Blake. At least, he was left as such; but it seems, by some means or another, he escaped."

"Is this man in custody?" asked the judge.

"No, my lord, he is not, though a warrant has been issued for his apprehension."

"Go on."

"I brought Sheppard a prisoner to Newgate, from which place he managed to make his escape and regain

his companion, with whom he committed a highway robbery on the Dover road on the following evening."

"Did you capture them?"

"Yes, upon Blackfriars-bridge. I overpowered Sheppard, but Blake threw himself over the parapet into the river. I left the two other prisoners at the bar to keep guard over Sheppard, while I went with the rest and took a boat down the river; but Blake managed in the end to elude us."

"You then returned to Blackfriars-bridge, I presume?"

"I did, sir, with all speed; but on reaching it, I found that both prisoner and guard had disappeared. Important business immediately afterwards took me from London, and when I returned, the first intelligence I received was that the three prisoners were safely lodged in Newgate."

"That is all, Mr. Wild, I suppose."

"Well, nearly all. I visited Sheppard in his cell last night, in order to learn, if I possibly could, where his comrade in iniquity was likely to be found. But, taking me off my guard, he made a furious attack upon me with his heavy fetters; and I have no doubt, had it not been for the timely interposition of the turnkeys, he would have put an end to my life."

This was another of Jonathan's master-strokes.

"That is all, Mr. Wild," said the junior counsel, "without my friend here for the defence wishes to put any questions to you."

The young barrister, who had gone through the form of watching the case, shook his head negatively.

Jonathan left the witness-box in triumph.

His evidence damaged the prisoners fearfully, and none knew it better than himself.

"My lord," said the junior counsel, addressing the judge, "I have here the names of several witnesses who will testify to Sheppard having broken out of Newgate, and caused the death of Godfrey, the turnkey; but as this case is one in which all three are implicated, I imagine the ends of justice will be met by passing over that clause in the indictment, and treating only with this."

The judge inclined his head.

"Call Mr. Skellum."

The police-officer, under whose direction the little force which had apprehended Jack and his companions was, stepped into the box and was sworn.

"Will you be good enough, Mr. Skellum, to relate what took place on or about the night of the twenty-fifth of this month?"

"Yes, sir."

"Begin, then."

"By instructions received, I went, accompanied by twelve police-officers, to the 'Black Lion' public-house, to see if I could find any trace of Jack Sheppard, who had escaped from Newgate."

"Just so; go on."

"Towards morning, as we were going down Wych-street, from the direction of Drury-lane, we heard an alarm of thieves, and, upon hastening forward, we found the alarm proceeded from the house of John Roots, the carpenter, round whose shop-door a number of people had already assembled."

"Go on, if you please."

"Understanding that the robbers were within the house, we were about to effect a forcible entry, when we heard the loud report of a pistol."

"Who do you mean by we?"

"Myself and my men."

"Very good; what next?"

"We set to work in good earnest to batter down the door, but, as it was a very strong one, it for some time resisted our efforts. At last we forced it from its hinges."

"Did you hear anything on the inside?"

"No, sir, all was quiet; but just as we knocked down the door, out rushed the three prisoners! They fought desperately, and made the strongest efforts to make their escape, but, thanks to the exertions of the men who were with me, they were prevented from achieving their end."

"Did you make them all prisoners?"

"We did, sir."

"Turn round and look at the prisoners at the bar. Are you ready to swear that those are the three men whom you captured?"

"I am quite ready to swear to them, sir."

"That is enough. What was the next step you took?"

"Having made sure the prisoners were safe, I spoke to half-a-dozen of the officers, and made my way into the house."

"Did you find anything?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"The body of John Roots!"

"Where did you find this?"

"At the foot of the staircase."

"In what condition was it?"

"Swimming in blood!"

"From whence did the blood proceed?"

"From a bullet wound in the chest."

"And you heard a pistol fired while you were outside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you search the prisoners?"

"All of them, sir."

"And did you find them armed with pistols?"

"All carried them, sir. We likewise found in the pockets of Flood and Blewitt a number of bags of money, which can be sworn to as belonging to John Roots."

"And what did you do upon finding the body in the state you describe?"

"I had him raised up."

"Was he living?"

"Just, sir, and that was all."

"Was he in possession of his senses?"

"Oh! yes, sir. He understood me when I spoke to him. I asked him if it lay in his power to pronounce the name of his murderer."

"And did he do so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who did he say had done the deed?"

"Jack Sheppard!"

CHAPTER CLXIX.

MR. JUSTICE POWIS PASSES SENTENCE OF DEATH UPON THE THREE PRISONERS, AND MR. CUNNINGHAM MAKES HIS APPEARANCE WHEN IT IS TOO LATE.

"Now Mr. Skellum," said the junior counsel, "this is a very important point. Now, knowing this, are you prepared to swear that the name pronounced by Mr. Roots was Jack Sheppard?"

"I am, sir, and what is more, the men who were with me will corroborate what I say, for they all heard it as well as myself."

"Very good, Mr. Skellum. That is sufficient. You then, I presume, conveyed the prisoners to Newgate?"

"I did, sir."

"That will do, then. You can stand down."

Mr. Skellum accordingly stood down, and several of the officers were called, who swore most positively as to the purport of the last dying words of John Roots.

They all swore, too, to the identity of the prisoners. In fact, that was a thing which admitted of no dispute.

This concluded the case for the prosecution, so the young counsel sat down.

The barrister who had, at the request of the judge, taken upon himself to watch the case, had certainly done no more, for he had not taken the trouble to interrupt the proceedings once.

The clerk of the arraigns rose and said—

"Are there any witnesses for the defence?"

Of course a negative was the reply.

The judge then rapidly commenced turning over the voluminous notes he had taken during the trial.

At last, having adjusted his spectacles to his satisfaction, he commenced summing up.

The court was intensely silent.

He spoke in a low tone of voice, but every word he uttered was heard with the utmost distinctness.

"Gentlemen of the jury—

"It has never fallen to my lot, since I have taken my seat upon this bench, to have a clearer case brought before me than that which has just now been brought to a conclusion.

"As you are aware, it is my duty, when summing up, to call your attention to any difficult or doubtful points, or any places where the evidence of one witness clashes with that given by another, but, on the present occasion, I have no such duty to perform; for, from first to last, the case is as clear and complete as any case could possibly be.

"The evidence given by the various witnesses has in every instance corresponded, or fitted in, with that given by the rest.

"It is stated, upon the most incontestible evidence, that the youngest prisoner at the bar had a feeling of ill-will towards his master, John Roots.

"Whether there was, or whether there was not, any just cause for this ill-will, is quite extraneous to the present inquiry. With the motives which gave rise to it we have nothing whatever to do. It existed, and Sheppard swore to have his revenge.

"Then we have also, upon the clearest evidence, that a burglary was committed and John Roots murdered.

"The alarm was raised, and the three prisoners who stand now before you were taken in the very act of escaping.

"It will be seen, too, that the crime of murder attaches itself to the youngest prisoner only, for the murdered man, with his latest breath, declared that he, and he alone, did the deed.

"But the penalty for both crimes is precisely the same—namely, death."

"And I am bound, also, to add that if you feel any reasonable doubt as to the guilt of either of the prisoners, it is your duty to give them the benefit of such doubt; but if, on the contrary, you feel that no doubt exists, then it is your duty, as members of that society whose welfare is so essential to you, not to shrink from the recordation of your verdict."

The jurymen, after the termination of this address, did not pause a moment to deliberate, but just turned round in their seats, and the foreman sat down.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the clerk of the arraigns, "have you decided upon your verdict?"

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoners guilty or not guilty?"

"We find the prisoners Blewitt and Flood guilty of burglary, and we find the prisoner Sheppard guilty both of burglary and murder!"

A moment's silence followed, and then the clerk, turning towards the prisoners, asked the stereotyped question—

"Have you anything to say, why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

Flood and Blewitt were silent, for they knew it would be perfectly useless to say anything.

But Jack Sheppard, the moment the question was put, replied to it with extraordinary vehemence.

"Yes!" he cried, and his voice rang through the crowded court, "Yes, I have a great deal to say why sentence should not be passed upon me! I declare I am innocent! I have not been fairly tried, and innocent facts have been twisted and contorted till they have assumed their present shape! Jonathan Wild is my enemy, and has sworn to hang me! I am innocent! I am innocent!"

The judge paid apparently little or no notice to this appeal.

He stooped down and fumbled about under his desk.

He was feeling for the black cap.

At length he found it, and having adjusted it upon his head, proceeded to pass sentence of death in the usual form.

"Prisoners at the bar, you have this day been tried by an impartial jury, and found guilty of the crimes of which you severally and jointly stand accused, and all that now remains for me to do is to pass sentence of death in the prescribed manner.

"I cannot do so, however, without expressing my sentiments upon the matter. In particular, I allude to the youngest prisoner, Jack Sheppard.

"It is my firm conviction that were we to look back into the dim ages of the past, and bring to light each individual case of base ingratitude, we should fail to find one so base, so black, as this unhappy young man's presents.

"He, besides, seems to have become enamoured of crime for its own sake alone. The awful fate of his father has not had the effect of deterring him in the least.

"As the counsel for the prosecution very justly said, under the circumstances, few persons in the city could be found who would be willing to admit him as a member of their family. But Mr. Roots charitably put all that aside. His intention was to teach him a trade, by which he would

always be able to earn a decent livelihood, and make him a decent member of society.

"We have seen his reward.

"And this is the more to be regretted because there are many placed in a similar situation through the misdeeds of their parents, and all these will now have to suffer for his misdeeds.

"Let me earnestly entreat you, young man, to occupy the brief space of time which is allotted to you before you quit this world for ever in religious exercises, and I sincerely trust that you will be successful in making your peace with your justly-offended Maker."

The judge paused, and then addressed himself to Flood and Blewit.

"As for you," he said, "no words can sufficiently reprobate your conduct. Your duty was to watch over the peace of this city, and prevent the commission of crime; but, so far from doing so, you have colloqued with another, and set the example of committing it. No pity can be felt for either of you, and I have never been more reconciled to the disagreeable duty I am now performing than I am upon this occasion.

"The sentence of this court upon you is, that you be removed from the bar at which you now stand, and taken to the place from which you came, and thence to the place of common execution, where you are to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may the lord have mercy on your souls!"

A deep and awful silence followed the pronouncement of this sentence, but before the prisoners could be removed a great hubbub arose at the entrance to the court.

Then a man in a state of the greatest possible excitement, rushed in.

Jack knew him at a glance.

It was Mr. Cunningham.

"My lord, my lord!" he cried, "my lord, I appeal to you. I was engaged to defend the prisoner at the bar, but some of his enemies, fearing the result of my interposition, decoyed me away, and I have only just been able to return. I find I am too late. My lord, I believe in the innocence of my client."

The judge moved his lips, and the desire to know what he had to say was strong enough to make Mr. Cunningham silent.

The jailers, too, whose duty it was to remove Jack from the dock to the condemned hold, paused to see how this new phase in the proceedings would eventuate.

"Mr. Cunningham," said the judge, "you are in a state of great excitement, and only partly conscious, doubtless, of what you are about. For that reason I will look over the breach of etiquette you have committed in bursting into the court in so unceremonious a manner. Your client—if such he is—has been fairly and impartially tried for the crimes of which he stood accused. He has been found guilty, and the last sentence of the law been passed upon him, and you must know that in criminal cases there is no appeal."

"But, my lord"—

"As to your having been decoyed away by some one inimical to the prisoner, that has nothing to do here. You must bring that charge at another time and place. Usher, clear the court!"

The judge rose abruptly from his seat, and pushing aside a crimson curtain, vanished from view.

Behind that curtain was a room, upon a table in the centre of which were some very delicate and tempting refreshments, provided at the expense of the good city of London for his refectory.

He sat down to a calm discussion of these, as though nothing at all was the matter.

In the meantime Mr. Cunningham was hustled out of court.

Jack was tapped on the shoulder by one of the turnkeys.

It was vain to resist.

Besides, he was crushed in spirit.

He accompanied them without a word, and in less than five minutes was an inmate of the condemned hold in Newgate.

Jonathan Wild triumphed at last.

CHAPTER CLXX.

A VERY STRANGE AND MYSTERIOUS EVENT HAPPENS AT JONATHAN'S HOUSE WHILE HE IS ABSENT AT THE TRIAL.

ON the morning upon which the trial took place, a great deal of gossip was going on in Wild's house.

Upon one point all, however, quite agreed, and that was, that all three would be found guilty and condemned.

Knowing that Jonathan would not return for some time, they thought the opportunity of making merry should not be lost, so one of the number was sent over to the "Maggie."

On his return, he brought with him a plentiful supply of drink, so all the men who were in the house sat down to enjoy it.

There were several present whose names are familiar to the readers of this history.

For instance, there was Tonks, and Wilkinson, and Levee, and Arnold.

"Who is this new hand Johnny has taken on?" asked the latter.

"I don't know."

"He seems rather a queer fish, don't he?"

"Very."

"Well, where is he?"

"I don't know. Who has seen him this morning?"

No one had.

"Perhaps Johnny has sent him out on some business of other."

"May be. But I say, mates—"

"What?"

"Keep a sharp look out on what you do. He aint one of us, that's certain, and he's sure to turn spy."

"Well, he had better not be caught at it, that's all."

"Be careful—that's the best plan. He's too civil and too humble by half."

"Curse him, he's an interloper. Can't we invent some way of getting shut of him?"

"I don't know."

"I should think we could, if we tried."

"I can't help thinking it very strange he is not here this morning. I don't believe he has been sent out."

"Well, we shall see. It aint often, mates, that we have an opportunity of carousing together, like we have this morning, and so don't let a lubber like that spoil our fun."

"No, no! Bravo! all right! we wont! Hurrah! Here's success to Jonathan Wild, and long life to him, the villain!"

At this moment there came a slight tap at the outer door.

Commonplace as was the sound, yet it made all start, and look terrified.

It was Wilkinson who rose and opened the door.

One of the band entered.

He had been at the court.

"Is the case on?"

"Yes, mates."

"Well, how are they bringing it in?"

"Why, you see, Johnny's giving his blessed evidence. Lor! how I wish you could see him. It's a sight to look upon, I can tell you; he's the very image of a lamb."

"Ha! ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"At the idea of Jonathan being a lamb."

"Well, he is; and ain't he a gammoning the judge! The day will go against Jack Sheppard as safe as eggs."

"Oh! we all knew that—we"—

The speaker paused.

He was interrupted in what he was going to say by a shriek so loud, so shrill, so awful, that all those bold and hardened men were riveted to their seats, so appalling was the sound.

Ere, however, it could fairly die away, the shriek was followed by another, in a very different note.

This last shriek, too, differed from the former materially.

The first was a prolonged sound.

The latter a succession of short screams.

The men now recovered a little from their surprise, and sprang to their feet.

"Good God!" said one, "what's that?"

A loud crash followed his ejaculatory question.

"Murder!" cried another; "it's murder!"

"Murder, where?"

"It is upstairs. I'm sure the sound came from upstairs. There's something going on there that ought not to be."

"What shall we do?"

"Fetch Jonathan."

"No, no; let us go up and find out what it is. It will be time enough to send for Jonathan then."

"So it will. Come along."

Upon this, the whole of the men made their way in a dense throng to the foot of the stairs.

They began to ascend very rapidly, but as they got higher and higher their speed abated.

The first landing was almost total darkness.

But one of them, bolder than the rest, threw open a door leading into a room in the front of the house.

A broad beam of light streamed through it.

Ejaculations of alarm and terror burst from their lips.

It revealed, lying at the foot of the second flight of stairs, a female form, in a strangely huddled-up attitude.

Blood was upon her clothing in many places.

For a moment all stood looking on in silence.

They were almost afraid to speak.

Presently one asked—

"Who is it?"

The question aroused the others, and two or three at once sprang forward, and tried to lift the prostrate form.

Upon doing so, her face was turned towards the light.

"Hallo!" said the one who first saw it. "May I be scragged if it ain't Mary Milliner!"

"Mary Milliner?"

"Yes."

"You don't say so!"

They all crowded forward in order to obtain a better view.

But the inspection only served to confirm what their companion had said.

It was Mary Milliner.

A groan came from her lips when she was touched, and heaving a deep sigh, she expired.

"Dead as a nut!" said the one who had raised her up, and as he spoke, he let go her head, which fell with a disagreeable dab upon the edge of the bottom stair.

"What's the meaning of this?"

"Shall we send for Johnny?"

"She's quite dead," said another. "Well, well! I thought she was very bad in the doctor's hands. What made her fall down stairs, and break her blessed neck like that for?"

"But I don't believe she did fall down."

"Why not?"

"Didn't we hear two screams?"

"To be sure we did."

"And the first scream warn't a bit like t'other."

"No, it was not."

"We haven't heard all."

"That's quite certain."

"Let's go on."

"Up higher?"

"You go first."

"No, you."

At last, in a body, as before—having first moved the body of Jonathan's mistress out of their way—they ascended the next flight of stairs.

But upon reaching the top, all was still.

There were no signs of violence, nor any sounds indicative of it.

This landing, too, was better lighted than the other, so when another door was opened, they were able to see all about it quite plainly.

The first place to which all simultaneously turned their eyes, was the little flight of stairs leading up to the attics.

But at the foot of these there was not, as they had all expected, another ghastly-looking female form.

"What are we to make of this, mates?"

"Go higher. It's no good stopping here."

"Come on, then."

The attics were reached and searched.

But nothing whatever out of place was found.

Puzzled and bewildered, the men went down again to the second landing.

Here two or three less adventurous than their companions had lingered.

"There's nothing up above. We've searched every part?"

"What are we to make of it?"

"It's very strange."

"Very."

"My inside is all of a tremble."

"So's mine."

"Let us look about us. What door is that open?"

"The one leading into her room."

"Whose?"

"Mary Milliner's."

"Let us go in."

They did so, but nothing whatever that would tend to explain what they had seen met their view.

The apartment afforded every indication of having been recently occupied, but there was nothing to indicate that its inmate had left it under any peculiar circumstances.

There was no elucidation of the mystery there.

The men were more terrified than ever.

They went out again on to the landing.

Two other doors, leading into bedrooms, opened from it.

One of these they looked into and found empty.

The other was the one in which Edgworth Bess was confined.

The door of this was locked, and they found it impossible to obtain an entrance.

Jonathan had the key.

But they knocked upon the panel.

No sound was returned.

The summons was repeated, but with the same result.

A consultation now took place, which terminated with their going down to the second landing.

Here they found the body of the thief-taker's paramour in the same way as they had left it.

But, though she was beyond all question quite dead, yet there was nothing whatever to show by what means her death had been brought about.

Moreover, upon making a closer examination, they found a long black-hafted knife sticking in her breast, and it was from this wound that the blood upon her clothing had come.

"Let us leave her just as she is," said Quilt Arnold. "Don't any of you touch her. I will run round to the sessions-house, and tell Jonathan what has happened."

He started off as he spoke, and soon afterwards returned with the thief-taker, who left the court the moment after sentence was pronounced.

A look of great anxiety was on his face.

The mysterious occurrence troubled him not a little.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

SHOWS HOW THE PRESENCE OF STEGGS IN THE THIEF-TAKER'S HOUSE TURNED OUT A FORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCE FOR EDGWORTH BESS.

STEGGS had a difficult part to play.

Jonathan's regular men looked upon him with the greatest suspicion and distrust.

But he was so very humble to all of them, that they could do nothing.

Almost the first discovery he had made, after being installed in his new place, was that Jonathan had a prisoner upstairs.

But he did not know who.

His heart, however, whispered to him that it was poor Edgworth Bess, whom now, to give the man credit, he was more willing to help and serve than he had been formerly to persecute.

Should his surmise as to who Jonathan's prisoner was turn out to be correct, he would have to keep the strictest possible watch over his behaviour, or he would not be able to render her much assistance.

Upon the morning when the trial took place, Steggs managed to withdraw himself from his companions.

He crept upstairs, and hid himself in Jonathan's private room.

Then, when he had ascertained that the thief-taker had left the house, and would be absent from it for several hours, he proceeded to put a pre-determined plan into execution.

Leaving his hiding-place, he crept stealthily up the second flight of stairs.

Upon reaching the top he paused, for he heard a faint movement.

The stairs were dark, so he crouched down upon them.

Some one was coming.

One of the doors upon the landing opened.

Crouching down still lower, he watched and waited.

A woman came forth.

Who she was Steggs had no idea.

Her proportions were rather immense, and she was what many would call a fine-looking woman.

The reader will no doubt judge this was Mary Milliner. And so it was.

The little fracas between her and her amiable consort is, doubtless, fresh in the recollection of the reader.

Upon the occasion referred to, Jonathan had drawn his sword and transixed her with it.

She was then handed over to Mr. Snoxall, under whose care she remained for some time in a very precarious condition. But at length she nearly recovered from the effects of the wound.

She was, however, afraid to show her face to the thief-taker, for fear he should treat her to some further ill-usage.

It was not long, however, before she learned that Jonathan had brought home a female prisoner, and confined her in the room adjoining hers.

Mr. Snoxall, of course, was her informant.

From him she elicited these important facts.

The female prisoner was young.

She was fair.

She was beautiful.

She was ill, and Jonathan had manifested the greatest desire to have her brought to a proper state of health.

Moreover, that he had offered the man of physic the very large sum of two hundred pounds if he was successful.

Now, when we take into consideration the position which Mary Milliner held.

And the violence of her temper.

We shall certainly see cause enough for her to be suddenly inflamed with jealousy.

In fact, it amounted to a frenzy.

Woman like, she jumped immediately to the conclusion that her Jonathan had brought her there with matrimonial designs.

She did not, however, take into calculation that the prisoner might have the greatest possible aversion to her jailer.

She did not think she would sooner suffer a thousand deaths than become the bride of such a man.

On the contrary, she thought she would, to use her own expression, jump at the offer as soon as it was made her.

But she determined she would have no rivals in the affection of her Jonathan.

Accordingly, on that morning—an eventful one it seemed destined to be—she resolved to put an end to the prisoner's existence.

Arming herself with a knife, and uttering some very diabolical threats, she emerged from her own room.

Steggs, however, had not the advantage the reader has, of being in possession of the facts which have gone before, and though he heard her muttering to herself about something, and was able even to catch a word here and there, he could not, for the life of him, think what she was after.

He fancied at first that she was going to descend the stairs, but he found she passed the top of them, and went to the door which Steggs knew perfectly well, opened into the chamber occupied by Edgworth Bess.

His heart beat rather painfully when he saw this, but felt thankful he was at hand to protect, in case any danger should threaten her.

And now Mary Milliner, after a good deal of fumbling, produced a skeleton-key from her pocket, with which she unlocked the door.

No sound followed this movement, and after a little hesitation, the woman entered.

Steggs crawled swiftly and stealthily forward.

He knew the difficulties of his situation.

But, just as he reached the door, that horrible scream had arisen, whose ear-piercingness had so startled the ruffians who were carousing below.

Edgworth Bess was sleeping when Jonathan's mistress unlocked the door.

Mr. Snoxell had administered a narcotic the night before, and she had not yet recovered from its effects.

But the slight clicking of the lock partially aroused her.

The footsteps of her foe completely did so.

She opened her eyes, and looked up.

To her unbounded surprise, she saw a huge woman leaning over her.

It was under the impulse of the moment that she uttered the scream.

There was something in the expression of the woman's face, and a baleful look in her eyes, which frightened her. Steggs bounded forward.

He was just in time.

Mary Milliner had drawn the knife with which she had provided herself from its sheath in the bosom of her dress.

She held it suspended in the air.

Another moment, and it would have been brought down with the full strength of her powerful arm upon the breast of Edgworth Bess.

But, ere she could achieve her fell intent, Steggs had grasped her wrists.

He could not prevent it descending, however, but he averted it.

It sank deeply into the clothing of the bed.

Then he shifted his grasp from her wrist to her neck, and a furious struggle commenced.

It was during that struggle that Mary Milliner uttered the short, sharp, shrill screams.

But Steggs quickly found that, in point of mere bodily strength, he was no match for his opponent; and therefore, with great suddenness, he drew the knife from the bed, and plunged it into her breast.

The blow was almost immediately fatal.

The blade had reached some vital part.

Then Steggs thought how awkwardly he was situated.

What should he do?

How should he avert suspicion from himself?

An idea flashed across his fertile brain in a moment, and he at once proceeded to carry it out.

He dragged the now almost helpless woman from the room.

Then to the top of the stairs.

Exerting his whole strength, he then picked her up and pitched her over the balusters.

She fell to the bottom of the flight, a distance of twelve feet at least, like a log of wood.

So far, then, all was well; but then Steggs knew that an alarm would be immediately raised, the body found, and the upper portion of the house thoroughly searched.

Should he be discovered, suspicion would at once fall upon him.

What excuse could he make to account for his position there?

None.

At least, none that would be satisfactory.

Where was he to conceal himself.

Hiding-places in plenty there no doubt were, but then was there one which would not be pried into?

Hastening back to the door of Edgworth Bess's room, he took the skeleton-key out of the lock, where Mary Milliner had left it sticking, and, entering the chambers, close the door after him.

Then he locked it on the inner side, and returned the key to his pocket.

Feeble as Edgworth Bess was, she saw that the actions of Steggs were the actions of a friend and not a foe.

Besides, had he not saved her from a horrible death?

Approaching the bedside he said, in a low emphatic tone.

"Do not cry out or make the least noise. In me you see a friend who will defend you to the full extent of his ability. But I cannot single-handed fight against so many."

"What is it? Tell me, I cannot think."

She pressed her hands over her eyes, as she spoke in the manner of one much confused.

"Wait a little," said Steggs, "Hark, cannot you hear them coming?"

The tramping of many footsteps on the stairs followed his question.

"Yes! yes! I hear them."

"Be silent, then, and I will tell you all presently. If

anyone knocks, do not reply to them. Jonathan himself is from home. If any one enters, profess entire ignorance of everything. Do you understand me?"

"Quite."

"Good, then I will conceal myself, and now be silent. If our voices were heard, we should be ruined."

With the foreboding feeling at his heart that he was going to find that something dreadful had happened, Jonathan Wild made his way upstairs to the room containing his fair prisoner.

He thrust the proper key into the lock.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

SHOWS THE READER THE CAPITAL PLAN WHICH BLUESKIN DEvised FOR JACK'S ESCAPE.

JACK SHEPPARD is in the condemned hold, as that portion of the prison was called which was exclusively set aside for the reception of those upon whom the dread sentence of death had been passed.

The time has passed wearily for him, and as minute after minute elapsed, he felt that he was hastening to his doom.

He had given up all hopes of making his escape.

The large cell in which he was placed was shared by his two comrades in guilt, and three turnkeys, who were relieved every two hours.

Thus they were never suffered to be alone.

At length the morrow, which was Friday, came.

The day wore away.

Jack heard of no one.

Several, however, had come to visit Flood and Blewitt.

It must be understood that just inside the door by which prisoners were admitted, and which was placed at the top of a little flight of stone steps leading down into the Old Bailey, was a kind of vaulted apartment or vestibule generally known among the officials as "the lodge."

When you stood inside this place, and the door by which you had entered closed, you would have seen several other doors.

One led into a little ante or waiting-room, which had been fitted up for the accommodation of such turnkeys as might be off duty.

Another led to the governor's house, and three or four more to different parts of the huge building.

But just opposite "the wicket," for so the door leading into the street was designated, was a door of so peculiar a character that we are obliged to describe it.

It was formed of bars of iron laid crosswise, one over the other, so as to form a kind of network.

When any visitors came, they had to stand in front of this grating, while the prisoners in the condemned hold were allowed to go up a flight of steps and stand on the other side of it.

In this way the conversation took place, with the bars between them.

Blewitt and Flood then, as we have said, had been permitted to go up to this grating several times, as one or other of their friends came to see them.

But no one came to see Jack until just before the closing hour on Friday night, when the agreeable intelligence was brought to him that some visitors were waiting for him.

Like the rest, he ascended the flight of steps.

To his surprise and disappointment, he found his visitors were two gaunt-looking, shabbily-dressed women, who sent up a howl of lamentation as soon as they saw him approach.

Jack's quickness of perception immediately showed him that there was something more in this than met the eye.

He pressed himself, therefore, as closely as he could against the bars, and scrutinized their features narrowly.

One of the women did the same as he did—namely, press against the bars, while the other set up a more lugubrious howling than before.

"Jack!" said a voice, which Sheppard instantly recognised. "Make no movement, utter no exclamation of surprise at seeing me in this disguise, but it is the best I could think of. Jack, I have come to help you to escape!"

Escape! How the word thrilled through every nerve in Jack's body.

And who was it that spoke?

"Blueskin!"

"I couldn't come before, Jack, nor I couldn't think of anything, but now I've got a scheme all cut and dried. I can't give you full explanation, but we must set about it at once. We can talk the while."

"But what are you going to do?"

"I will tell you. Howl away," he added, to the other female, who was no other than the landlord of the "Black Lion."

"Jack."

"Yes, Blue."

"Do you see the top of the door?"

"Yes."

"The spikes, I mean."

"Yes—yes."

"Do you think you could squeeze between them if one was taken out?"

With a beating heart Jack looked up before he replied to this question.

Along the cross-barred iron gate which we have described, was a row of sharp iron spikes.

They were seven in number.

Jack measured the distance.

"I think I could get through if the middle one was broke off, but how can it be done? We shall be seen."

"Leave that to me," said Blueskin, "so long as you can through. Look here."

As he spoke he produced from beneath his clothes a curious looking instrument.

It was a miniature saw, of the kind used for sawing timber into planks, and used by two men.

It was, however, formed of the finest-tempered steel.

Its length seven or eight inches at the utmost.

One side was cut into a number of fine sharp teeth.

"Now, Jack!" said Blueskin, "there's the little tool that will help you to escape."

"I see."

"Take hold of your end through the bars, so, that's it. I will take hold of the other. Place it close to the bottom of the middle spike and draw it gently backwards and forwards. It won't make much noise, because it is well oiled, and you will see how soon it will be through the spike. As soon as it is we will pull you down. Now then, set about it. Howl, Joe."

Joe did howl, and Jack, with fresh hopes in his breast, caught hold of one end of the tiny saw, and commenced drawing it backwards and forwards in the manner that his friend Blueskin had directed.

As he had told him, the sound which it produced was slight indeed, and such as would not be likely to attract observation.

And besides, the landlord, by keeping up a continual affectation of intense grief, drowned all slight noises.

"Where is Edgworth Bess?" was Jack's first question when the saw had fairly got to work.

"In Wild's power."

Jack groaned.

But his companion noticed that he worked with greater eagerness than before.

It was astonishing to see with what rapidity the saw cut into the spike.

One would have thought it was wood.

But then the iron of which it was composed was of the softest character.

The turnkeys were about, and though several of them looked, not one noticed what was going forward.

At length the time came for the prison to be closed.

The spike was almost sawn through, but not quite.

"We can't manage it to-night, Jack," said Blueskin.

"We had better give up at once. It's no use spoiling a good thing."

"But it will be noticed."

"What? the place we have been at work upon?"

"Yes."

"Pho, pho, no danger! Let go of your end."

Jack did so.

Blueskin next rubbed what grease there was clinging to the bar, and the fine dust that had mixed with it in the crevice in the spike, and then what they had done was imperceptible.

"There you are, Jack. Now lie down to-night with a lightened heart. You will be all right to-morrow."

"You will come again?"

"Oh! trust us."

"Now then, you women," said one of the turnkeys, in



[EDGORTH BESS IMPLORES STEGGS TO SAVE HER FROM JONATHAN WILD.]

a surly voice, "time's up, and you must be off at once."

"Good-bye, Jack," said Joe Johnson, in a choking voice, which was admirably assumed. "Good bye, Jack."

"Good-bye," said Sheppard.

As for Blueskin, he did not speak. He was fearful if he did that some tone of his voice might be recognised, so he contented himself with waving his hand.

The man on the lock was well known to him.

He had seen him a hundred times, and he felt far from comfortable when he saw him hold open the door to allow them to pass out.

But, with ready thought, he drew from his pocket a dilapidated handkerchief, and buried his face in it, pretending to be overcome with grief.

In this he was followed by Joe Johnson, who set up in addition one of those dismal and awful howls of his, which echoed through the prison.

"Now, you old woman, be off," said the turnkey. "It's good your howling and snivelling. Scragged he will be to a certainty."

"Oh! my poor dear Jack," moaned Johnson, making a movement as though it was his intention to return to the grating and take another farewell of the prisoner.

But the turnkey rudely pushed him towards the steps, and closed the door after him in such a manner that Joe was obliged either to descend the steps of his own accord, or be thrust down them.

Of course he preferred and adopted the first alternative.

Both the plotters were delighted with the success which had hitherto attended their daring enterprise.

They crossed over to the Old Bailey, and, upon turning the corner of Fleet-lane, where he felt certain none of the officials of the prison could see him, Joe slapped his comrade on the back and indulged in a loud laugh, to the no small astonishment of a boy who happened to be by.

But Blake administered rather a severe caution, for they were not yet in a position to triumph, though certainly they had got on very well so far.

In spite, however, of all he could say, Johnson was

unable to control his laughter, which, though not so vehement as before, had subsided into a very audible chuckle.

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

THE CONDEMNED HOLD IN NEWGATE. BOB BAINS RELATES THE STORY OF HELL-AND-FURY.

WITH what different feelings Jack Sheppard left the grating and returned to the condemned cell!

When he emerged from that gloomy habitation he had almost lost all hope.

He had already begun to feel resigned to his fate.

But what a change there was now.

It seemed, indeed, as though he was already at liberty.

He was careful, however, to conceal his elation, and he changed the expression of his countenance to one of sombre despair.

His footsteps, which upon the first impulse had been springy and elastic, he altered also.

Any change in his demeanour would, he knew well enough, be immediately noticed by those who were appointed to keep guard over him, and if it was of a hopeful character, they would immediately conjecture that he anticipated making his escape, and such a watch would be kept upon his movements as to make it impossible.

Already, in consequence of his former daring feat, they were unusually vigilant, and his best policy evidently was to act in such a manner as would cause them to abate that vigilance rather than increase it.

Fully alive to all this, Jack re-entered the condemned hold.

His appearance would have deceived the acutest observer, so admirably did he counterfeit deep and hopeless grief.

He walked in and sat down on the stone bench assigned to him with the air of one who has done with life.

But he brooded over the plan his friends had formed, and weighed in a more accurate balance his chances of escape.

It grew dark rapidly, until at length those six persons who sat in that dreary place were unable to distinguish the outlines of each other's faces.

Then, and not till then, for he felt it would be a relief to do so, Jack permitted his countenance to be the true index of his thoughts.

The more he pondered upon the plan, the more feasible it seemed.

Daring he had in plenty to enable him to attempt it, and, besides, he had this incentive that, let him do what he might, they could only hang him. The chances were all in favour of his bettering his position, and none for making it worse.

Then he thought of the poor heiress, Edgworth Bess, who had made so deep an impression on his heart, and, in spite of his self-command, he was almost betrayed into uttering a bitter execration upon the head of her persecutor and captor.

Fortunately, however, he controlled himself and was silent, though mentally he heaped up curses on his head.

But still he had hopes that that providence or good fortune, which had hitherto watched over her, would continue to keep her under its care.

Blueskin, who felt almost as great an interest in her welfare as he did, knew where she was, and would not he do everything he could to shield her from the machinations of the thief-taker?

He consoled himself with the idea that he would.

By that time to-morrow he himself would be at freedom, and then he should be content.

How long the time would seem, though, before that morrow came! What a many long weary hours would have to pass away before it came.

He resolved—and wisely—to determine in what manner he should employ himself as soon as he got free, and what should be the first step he should take.

With Blewitt and Flood the case was very different.

A change had come over them, but it was a change in no way resembling that which had come over Jack.

They had given up all hope.

They had come to the clear and definite conclusion that no chain of events, however remarkable, could avert their doom.

They were as certain they should die at the appointed time as they were that they were then in existence.

But instead of this conviction abasing them, as one would naturally suppose it would have done, they, with a rude and wild philosophy, determined that what little space of life remained to them they would enjoy and pass in the most agreeable manner they possibly could.

There were many obstacles in their way, but then, as we have before stated, they had been visited during the day by several of their companions, who had supplied them with money.

Under the old criminal code there was, as is well known, many abuses, and not the least of them was allowing prisoners to receive money, with which they could purchase whatever they thought proper.

And with those condemned to die a greater licence was allowed than with any others. Indeed, they were permitted to have just whatever they liked at their country's expense.

This is how it is when, in reading over the criminal annals of the past century, we find malefactors going to the scaffold in a state of intoxication.

Some even were all but incapable of motion, and almost deprived of sense, but the ebriety generally manifested itself in acts of ridiculous and disgusting bravado.

The first use, then, which Flood and Blewitt made of the money they had received was to hand it to one of the turnkeys, and order a quantity of drink.

This was fetched in, and the wretched prisoners, and those who had been appointed to watch over them, joined in a debauch.

The night was spent in the most boisterous revelry—singing songs at the top of their lungs, and telling tales in the lives of notorious depredators.

Jack had, of course, been asked to join the company, and judging that he should best keep off suspicion by consenting, he did so.

A steaming glass of hot gin and water was placed before him, and a regular carouse began.

No one would ever have dreamed that three of that bacchanalian company had been doomed to die in so short a time.

But so it was.

The picture we have drawn is neither an exaggerated nor an untrue one.

The glasses were filled and emptied with extraordinary rapidity, and the more rapidly these processes were gone through the more uproarious did the company become.

Louder and louder grew the peals of laughter as the fiery stimulant mounted to their brains.

At length, one of the officers put his empty glass down on the table, and smacking his lips with satisfaction, said—

"Ah! my lads, this is what I call fun, and no gammon! That's the style to do it! Why, I never recollect but one jolly set out like this here."

"When was that?" asked Blewitt.

"Oh! many a year back now. That was a lark, I can tell you!"

"Order—order!" cried the voices; "order, everybody! Order for Bob Bains! He's going to tell us a story."

By degrees silence was obtained.

"Oh! it ain't no story particular that I've got to tell you," said the officer who had first spoken, and who had been called by his comrades Bob Bains; "but I recollect now a matter of fourteen year ago, when a werry remarkable character was ketched, and brought to the old stone jug."

"Who was he?"

"You mean, what was his name?"

"Yes."

"Ah! that's what I can't tell you."

"Can't tell us?"

"No."

"How's that? Hadn't he got a name?"

"I s'pose he had, but nobody never knew what it was."

"And wasn't it never found out?"

"Not as I knows on."

"But surely there was a name you used to call him by?"

"Oh! yes; he had a sort of nickname, but it wasn't his real one."

"And what was the nickname?"

"Hell-and-Fury!"*

"Hell-and-Fury?"

"Yes. Rather a rummy name, warn't it?"

"Very."

"So everybody says."

"But why was he called that?"

"Because it was a word of his—a sort of—sort of a—"

"What is it, Jim?"

"Blest if I know."

"*Herpleetive*?"

"Yes, that's it. A sort of a *herpleetive* as he was always making use of. For instance, if he was astonished, he'd say, 'Hell-and-Fury!'"

"Oh! that's it?"

"Yes. Consequently, you see, he got to be called that for a name for want of a better, and I shouldn't wonder if that isn't the way half the people come by the queer names they've got."

"I shouldn't wonder; but what were you going to tell us?"

"About Hell-and-Fury!"

"Of course."

"Why, it's about fourteen year ago since he was brought into the old stone jug."

"What was he?"

"I ought to tell you that first. He was a real out and out hightobyman."

"One of the jolly old sort?"

"Yes, there was nothing of the sneak about him. He'd take up his station in the middle of the road, and when a carriage came by, he would ride up to the window as bold as brass, and, drawing a pistol, cry, 'Hell and fury! Hand over what you've got, or I'll sink every one of you!'"

"My eye!"

"You may well say that. He was the daringest chap as ever I've heard tell on, bar none."

"And you've had a pretty good experience?"

"I believe you. Why, I was born in this old place, and I have never slept out of it since, and now I'm getting quite an old man."

"Hear, hear," cried the rest, banging their glasses on the table, impatiently. "Let us hear what you have got to say about 'Hell-and-Fury!'"

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

RELATES HOW HELL-AND-FURY WAS BROUGHT TO NEWGATE IN A CARRIAGE AND FOUR, AND HOW JERRY ABERSHAW DANCED A HORNPIPE IN HIS FETTERS.

"All right, mates; all right. But don't be so impatient."

"You're so awfully long-winded."

"Well, then, I'll sum it up in a few words. He played the hightobyman for some time with very great success, and nobody could capture him. People got afraid to travel about, for, if he stopped decent-looking folks, and they had got no money with them, he used to ill-treat 'em awful."

"Did he?"

"I believe you; but at last they nabbed him, and it was the cleverest trick that ever I heard of."

"How they nabbed him, do you mean?"

"Of course I do, stupid; how you keep cross-questioning a fellow; and if it hadn't been by a trick, they would never have caught him to this day."

"What was the trick?"

"Why, a party of officers hired a magnificent carriage drawn by four beautiful horses."

"Whatever for?"

"Wait a bit, and I'll tell you. This was kept very quiet, but, when all was in readiness, ten of the best police officers all armed themselves and put on various disguises. The carriage was going to start from Edgware, so they made their way one at a time to that place."

"One who knew how to drive four-in-hand was disguised as a coachman, and another of them, dressed in plain clothes, sat by his side."

"Two more were disguised as footmen, and wore a very rich livery indeed. Of course, they stood at the back of the carriage."

"Yes—yes."

"Then the other six officers, dressed in plain clothes,

got inside the carriage, and, preparations being quite complete, they set off towards London."

"I see it now."

"No you don't. Hold your row, or else I stops this blessed minute!"

"No—no!" cried the rest. "Never mind him, go along."

"Well, then, as I told you, when they had all taken their seats, the carriage was driven in the direction of London, and a very aristocratic turn-out it looked, I can assure you, and was enough to deceive anybody."

"They calculated that it would deceive Hell-and-Fury if he happened to be on the road; and so it did, for just after they passed through Kilburn-gate, they heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, and a mounted man rode up."

"Halt!" he cried, to the coachman. "Halt, I say! Hell and fury, if you don't pull up, you are a dead man!"

"These words were quite enough to let the officers know they had got hold of the right person, so the one who played the part of coachman drew up with all the pleasure in the world."

"Seeing this, Mr. Hell-and-Fury rides up to the coach-window, and catching hold of it by the top, lets it down with a crash, while he put a pistol inside with all the boldness you can think of."

"But inside the carriage was quite dark, for they had not lighted the lamp, so he did not notice what a many people were inside."

"'Hell and fury!' he cried. 'Your money or your life! Quick! I have no time to lose.'"

"While this was going on, you must know, the two footmen, according to a previous arrangement, slipped down off the board at the back, and coming round to the side, one caught hold of him by one arm and the second by the other."

"Hell-and-Fury turned round with an oath, and tried to shake off his foes; but it was all to no purpose. They were used to that sort of thing, and besides, the two strongest men in the force had been selected to do the job."

"By the time he had twisted himself round, the two got off the box and laid hold of the bridle of his horse, while the others opening the door, rushed out in a body, and he was overpowered."

"He struggled manfully, however, to the last, but it was all to no purpose. What chance had one man got against ten who were bent upon taking him prisoner?"

"Accordingly, after a time, they pinioned him and put him inside the carriage, while the one whose seat he had taken mounted the highwayman's horse, and rode on in advance to Newgate to bring word that the celebrated Hell-and-Fury was caught, and that they were bringing him there securely bound and a prisoner."

"The greatest excitement took place, of course, and every preparation was made for his arrival, when, sure enough, soon afterwards the carriage drove up to the door of the lodge."

"He couldn't complain of the way they brought him, for I should think he is the only highwayman that ever has been or ever will be brought to Newgate in a carriage and four."

"Well, when it stopped, they opened the door and lifted him out all bound as he was, for they were afraid to loose him, and in that state carried him to the strongest cell in the prison."

"There they put him in some heavy irons—the very same ones, Mr. Sheppard, that you had on before your trial," remarked the speaker, by way of parenthesis, and looking at Jack as he spoke.

"What next, Bob?"

"Well, in course of time, as you may suppose, he was had up afore the beak, and a case of highway robbery brought agin him, which was fully proved, and so he was cast for death."

"After that, of course, he was brought here, and I was one that sat with him. It turned out while he was here that he had some rich and powerful friends, who tried hard to get him off, and who supplied him with lots of tin."

"He was a perfect gentleman when you came to know him, though he was able to act the blackguard uncommonly well; and it's my private belief that he was the rakish, good-for-nothing son of a family of rank; but nothing more was known of him except what was guessed, and which, of course, might be right or wrong, though, I

* A fact.

fancy, I can see through a deal board as well as here and there one.

"I can tell you one thing, however, that we all had a merry time of it while he was here, and we all looked forward with great sorrow to the time when we should have to part. As for money, he threw guineas about as if they were halfpence, and ate and drank of the best of everything that was to be had.

"Of course, we were all invited to have a share, and there used to be quite a fight to see who should be put in the cell with him—and you know, mates, that's a duty we all shirk if we possible can.

"It was quite the reverse with him, he was such a jolly companion. He used to tell us the rummiest tales of what he'd done in his time, and I thought at times I should have laughed till I died. He was enough to make the very walls laugh.

"Well, the night before he was scragged we had the jolliest jollification, barring this here, as has ever been had in the prison, and he no more cared for to-morrow than we did—nor half so much, indeed."

"And was he tucked up?"

"Ah! yes," exclaimed the narrator, wiping away a tear, which the hot gin and water had doubtless helped to produce; "I bid him farewell, and away he went. It was a real pity he should come to grief, that it was!"

"And you never found out his name?"

"Never from that day to this, nor anything about him. But he had got some rich relations, and I have no doubt was descended from some noble family or other."

"And did he die game?"

"As a cock! and he made such an elegant bow when he stood up in the cart that all the people cried 'Shame!' and if they hadn't been very quick, he would have been rescued."

"Ah! there's been some game coves in this place in my time," said another of the turnkeys. "Fill my glass, if you please. Thank you. Now, the gamest that ever I heard of—and it strikes me he'll beat Hell-and-Fury—was Jerry Abershaw."

"Oh! yes!" responded several. "I remember Jeremiah; he was an out-and-outer, with no gammon!"

"He certainly were," observed Bob Bains, reflectively. "He certainly were."

"To be sure he was! If Hell-and-Fury was brought in a carriage and four, he never did what Jerry did."

"What was that?" asked Jack.

"Why, he was such a desperate chap that they did not put him in the condemned hold here, but locked him up in a cell with a set of fetters on."

"Oh! indeed."

"Well, when the morning for the execution came, what do you think he did?"

"Escaped?"

"Oh! dear, no; we took good care of that."

"What was it, then?"

"Why, when he was brought out to have his irons struck off, before being put into the cart and driven to Tyburn—you won't believe it!"

"What?"

"He actually broke away; and though he had no end of ironwork about his wrists, folded his arms across his breast—so!"

The turnkey placed his arms in the position he described.

"Well, then, you must know, he had got all the fetters on that go round the waist and ankles. He actually—mind you, I saw it myself—danced a sailor's hornpipe all round the yard!"

"Wonderful!" ejaculated Jack.

"And that's not the most wonderful part either, for, not only did he make every step quite perfect in spite of the weight of the iron, but he made the fetters clank together and keep time like music."

"Impossible."

"Oh! it's quite true, I can assure you, ain't it Bill?"

You saw it as well as me."

"Certainly," replied the man appealed to, who was the third turnkey. "Certainly. As you say, I saw it; and it's quite true; we were all quite astonished at it, the governor, the sheriffs, the hangman, and chaplain, and everybody, and none of us attempted to stop him till he

had finished. But, as you have been telling tales among you, I have thought of one myself which is quite as rummy, if not more rummier than any we have heard yet."

"Let's have it, then, if it ain't a long 'un."

"Oh! it ain't a long 'un."

"Very well, then, fire away, for it will be our turn off directly."

CHAPTER CLXXV.

IN WHICH THE STORY OF THE QUAKER HIGHWAYMAN IS BROUGHT TO A TERMINATION.

THIS was true.

The guard was changed every two hours, and, as the last speaker had remarked, their two hours were nearly up, so that the tale, if they were to hear it at all, must be a short one, so as to be ended before three other men entered to take their places.

The turnkey began as follows:—

"If you won't interrupt me," he said, "by asking questions and making remarks, I shall very soon get to the end."

"We won't interrupt you, then. What's the tale about?"

"Some of you must have heard about it, I am sure. It's the quaker highwayman."

"Aminadab Gilchrist?"

"That's the man."

"Ah! that was a rum start. The idea of a quaker, dressed in broad cloth, being a highwayman."

"Ah! well. Order—order. Fill up the glasses, and let us hear the tale straightforward."

This proposal was immediately acceded to, and for a minute or so nothing was heard but the clinking of glasses.

Then the table was knocked until order was restored.

"Well, mates, it's a matter of twelve or fourteen years since the events took place I am going to relate. Ah! they were the good old times. People then wasn't so blessed particular as they is now.

"Never mind that, though. You must know that a highwayman then was rather a remarkable character, and he was thought a good deal of by both great and small.

"There was a good many tobymen on the road at the time I am speaking of, but there was none so celebrated as Captain Blackford.

"But you mustn't think, as you perhaps might, that he called himself Captain because he had got a gang of men under him. He merely, in a manner of speaking, assumed the name.

"Whenever he was met with, he was alone. He had no comrades, and never robbed in company with others.

"He was a very remarkable chap, I can tell you; and, talk about daring, he was the daringest that ever lived. He'd stand still to be shot at, and never move a muscle, and, somehow or other, the bullets did not seem to hurt him.

"He used to ride a magnificent horse—a real beauty. It would have fetched any money if it had been put up for sale.

"Well, this Captain Blackford and his mare used to do some astonishing things, and if ever any one was either going from or coming to London and carrying a booty worth having, Captain Blackford was sure to stop them. He never let one escape.

"He must have had some means of learning all this, of course, but, whatever it was, it was never found out.

"Rewards were offered for him, and all manner of dodges tried, but they were all of no avail. He was too old a bird to be caught by chaff, and they soon got tired of laying traps for him.

"Well, things went on, and he could be heard of almost every night, sometimes on the north road, sometimes on the western, and sometimes on the Dover road.

"One of the rummiest things about him was that he never injured anyone. He carried pistols, but he was never known to fire them. There was something terribly persuasive about the tones of his voice, when he commanded them to stop and hand over their cash, I suppose, for he never failed to get what he asked for.

"As I told you, he was fired at many and many a time, and he used to stand to let them, and took no notice, until at last the people began to get more frightened than

before, and used to think they were dealing with some one who was not of this world.

"There was something else about him, too, that was very strange. As you must all know, there is always a house or two in London where a knight of the road is to be met with when he is off duty, but it was not so with Captain Blackford. At all the kens he was as great a mystery as anywhere, and they knew no more of his whereabouts than anybody else did.

"As I told you, he used to ride a beautiful horse—always the same one—and as for speed and strength, I should think her equal was not to be found.

"Of course, as the officers were sent out specially to capture him, they got upon his track more than once, and gave him chase, but they never could catch him. He would fly before them on the road, and they would think they were gaining on him, when all of a sudden he would disappear, as though he was a ghost, and no after searching would find him.

"All this, you may be sure, made him more feared than ever, and increased his reputation not a little.

"At length, however, it was noticed that he always disappeared somewhere about the same spot, and that put the officers a little on the scent.

"The clue was a faint one, and they resolved to follow it up, but they could find nothing whatever that looked suspicious.

"There was only one residence near this place, and that was called Friendly Hall, and was occupied by a highly-respected quaker gentleman, by name Aminadab Gilchrist.

"He was very well known, and universally looked up to and admired, in spite of his peculiar creed, and, indeed, he was considered one of the first gentlemen in the county.

"This threw the officers off the scent again. They would as soon have thought of looking for the sun at midnight as Captain Blackford, the notorious highwayman, at Friendly Hall.

"They kept a sharp watch all round the place of disappearance, in the hope that they should see their prey make his appearance there again. But in this they were always disappointed. They would hear of him twenty or thirty miles off.

"Well, all this looked very strange, and everyone's excitement and curiosity got wound up to the highest pitch.

"Then the summer came, and during the warm light nights nothing at all was heard of him.

"It is really astonishing how soon the world forgets any one. This was a notable example. Before the winter came round again, he was no more thought of than if he had never existed.

"They were soon reminded, though. The secretary of state was coming up from Bristol in his carriage—no, let me see, I almost think it was Bath; however, that don't matter a straw—he was coming up to London, anyhow, after a few month's absence, when, having almost reached the end of his journey, he was stopped by Captain Blackford, and robbed of everything valuable he had with him.

"This created a great fuss, and the secretary of state doubled the reward, and added a couple of hundred pounds out of his own pocket.

"This started the officers again with fresh spirits, for altogether the sums now offered for his capture amounted to six hundred pounds.

"They set out, and for a long time were unsuccessful in meeting with him, but at length, on the Uxbridge-road, they heard a couple of screams, so, riding forward, they came to a carriage, the occupants of which had been robbed by the very individual of whom they were in search.

"From inquiry, they learned he had not left five minutes, and had taken the direction of the open country.

"This was enough for the officers. Away they went, and soon heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the ground. But although they spurred their horses to the utmost, they were unable to come up with him, and they returned to Bow-street defeated and disappointed.

"But they were determined not to be conquered, and kept up the chase.

"The winter, I recollect, set in very early, and in September we had several very heavy falls of snow, which succeeded each other with little intermission.

"After one of the snow-storms a sharp, hard frost had

set in, and the snow, which lay upon the ground was covered with a strong, crust-like ice, and which crackled and gave way before everything that was put on it.

"This was just the state of the road when the officers made another excursion after Captain Blackford.

"At Tyburn-gate they came up with him once more.

"He was standing there, waiting for the pike to be opened.

"The officers were upon him almost before he was aware of it, but, turning round his head, he saw their dark forms plainly revealed against the white ground.

"At this moment they called to him to surrender, but he took not the least notice of what they said.

"All he did was to back his horse a little, and as the pikeman would not open the gate, he leaped over it.

"As soon as the officers saw what he was about, they hastened forward and fired upon him, but whether any of their shots proved effective was more than they could tell; at all events no notice was taken of them.

"The gate was opened, and they all dashed through.

"They had now, they considered, the finest possible chance of hunting him down if they kept close after him, for the track which his horse made in the snow was very distinct, and consequently could be easily followed.

"Somehow or other it almost seemed as though the highwayman had overlooked the circumstance of leaving so plain an index as to the road he had taken as he did, but what happened afterwards tended to some extent to explain this.

"Away they went, however, at full speed, until the same familiar ground was reached where he had so often disappeared.

"Now, they thought, surely they would get at the heart of the mystery.

"The place at which this disappearance had taken place was where the high-road took a sudden curve round to the right.

"On one side of the road was a low hedge, with several immense meadows beyond.

"On the other side was a kind of park, or rather plantation, belonging to the gentleman quaker, Aminadab Gilchrist.

"But this was screened from the road by a high wooden paling, composed of upright pieces of wood, made so as to lap over one another, and the top of which was at least eight feet from the ground.

"Behind this grew some trees, and the top of the woodwork was defended by sharp iron spikes.

"It was clear no mortal horse could ever have leaped such an obstacle as that.

"This paling was of great length, extending to a distance of at least a mile, perhaps more.

"On reaching this place, then, for the highwayman still kept in advance, the officers found, as they had fully anticipated, that their prey had disappeared."

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

THE REMAINDER OF THE NIGHT IS SPENT BY THE PRISONERS AND THEIR JANITORS IN A CONVIVIAL MANNER.

JUST as the turnkey reached this point in his narration, and when, of course, the interest of his auditors was fully excited, a trampling of footsteps was heard outside, and the door of the cell was thrown open.

It was the three men who had come to relieve their comrades, whose term of duty had expired.

But, by the request of the prisoners, and the consent of the new comers, the three whose turn was off remained a little longer while the tale was finished, which, as can be seen, is rapidly approaching its termination.

An interruption of several minutes' duration, of course, occurred, but in a little while silence was restored.

"Now then, Jim," they cried, "make a finish of it."

"Hear, hear."

"You have done it well so far; keep it up."

The turnkey smiled and nodded his head at this compliment, then went on.

"I said when they got to the usual place the highwayman had disappeared.

"Being quite determined this time not to be baffled, they pulled up, and alighted from their steeds.

"The prints of the horses' hoofs could be plainly

enough distinguished up to a certain point, and there they stopped.

"This was at the side of the tall paling I have described.

"He had been riding at full speed, keeping close under the shadow of this for some time, but there was every indication of his having come to a halt.

"But just beyond that spot no hoof marks could be seen.

"What was the meaning of it?

"The officers searched closely all round about, and presently one discovered a splash of blood on the paling.

"This drew their attention more particularly to that one part of it, and the result was that they found a small door, but so cunningly contrived as to escape all observation, and almost the closest search.

"It is quite certain it would never have been found by the officers, although in a manner of speaking they were led to it, if it had not been for the splash of blood.

"They did not stand upon any ceremony, but set about battering the door down, which they easily did.

"Neither fastenings nor hinges were visible from the outer-side, so that the means of opening it were secret.

"The door soon ceased to be an obstacle to them, and then upon going through, they found their suspicions confirmed.

"The trees grew very thickly together, but there was a winding path through them just wide enough for a horse.

"The snow lay upon this path as it did upon the high-road, and there were the horse's footprints quite plain and distinct.

"Here and there, too, when they looked, they distinguished spots of blood, which showed that the highwayman was wounded by the discharge at Tyburn, and, therefore, they calculated upon finding him in a very helpless condition indeed.

"The little narrow path was about half a mile long.

"Upon reaching the end of it they found themselves in a large and well-cultivated garden.

"Still following the track, they came at last to the stables attached, or rather belonging to, Friendly Hall.

"The door was locked, but they broke it open.

"The stable was one that would hold about a dozen horses. There were stalls for that number, but only four horses at present occupied it.

"One of these was in a profuse sweat, and gave every token of the hard riding it had had.

"With little or no doubt upon their minds, the officers left two of their number in charge of the stables, while the rest proceeded in a body to the hall.

"No single ray of light from any window indicated that the inhabitants were up.

"But having surrounded the premises in such a manner that they felt certain no one could leave without their knowledge, the officers proceeded to the front door of the mansion, and gave a loud summons for admission.

"They had to repeat this before any notice was taken, and then a window in one of the upper stories was violently thrown up, and a head projected from it.

"When the officers commanded the door to be opened in the king's name, the head was quickly withdrawn, and, after a little delay, they were allowed to enter.

"All was quiet, and the officers began to fear, that after all, Captain Blackford would be one too many for them.

"Where is your master?" asked one.

"In bed, sir," was the reply.

"Then tell him he is wanted. Ask him to step down. We will wait here in the hall till he comes."

"The servant departed upon this errand.

"The officers more than suspected the identity of Captain Blackford with Aminadab Gilchrist, and a little time would set those suspicions at rest, or confirm them.

"The highwayman had been wounded.

"If the quaker proved to be un hurt, it would be tolerably good evidence that he was not the man. If he was, it would fix it on him at once.

"You can imagine how impatiently they waited for the servant to return.

"At length he came.

"My master is in bed, as I told you, and is suffering from severe indisposition. Therefore, he cannot see you."

"Oh! indeed! What time did he go to bed?"

"At his usual hour."

"What time is that?"

"Half-past ten."

"Did you see him then?"

"Of course."

"Very good! Was anything the matter with him then?"

"Not as I know of, but he may have been took ill in the night."

"So he may; and I consider it my duty to take you a little while, and we will go up and see your master."

"The servant was much surprised, but made no resistance.

"The remainder of the household was now getting a-stir.

"The servant they had prisoner they compelled to conduct them to the door of his master's bedroom.

"They knocked, and then, as no answer was given, tried to enter.

"But the door was locked.

"The usual command to open was given, which was not obeyed, so they broke that door down also, despite the remonstrances of the servant, who was thoroughly terrified and alarmed, and without any idea of what was amiss.

"All made a rush into the apartment, which was dimly lighted by an oil lamp on the mantelpiece.

"As they entered, their ears were assailed by a groan.

"A sight met their gaze for which none were exactly prepared.

"Lying half across the bed, and literally bathed in blood, was the bold highwayman, Captain Blackford.

"There could be no doubt about the matter. He was in his well-known dress, a portion of which, however, he had attempted to remove when he seemed to have sunk back upon the bed through weakness.

"Is that your master?" said one of the officers to the servant. "Beware how you speak falsely!"

"The man appeared to be much surprised at seeing his master in such a garb, and he looked attentively in his face before he gave any reply, and then he said—

"Yes, that is master."

"And what is his name?"

"Aminadab Gilchrist."

"This was enough. It was quite clear that the rich and respected quaker, and the much-dreaded highwayman were one and the same person."

"Is that all?" asked Blewitt, as he perceived the narrator paused.

"Well, almost. The wound that he had received at Tyburn was a fearful one, and how he managed to reach home alive is a mystery. He must have been only partially conscious of what he was about."

"And did he die then?"

"Oh! yes. A very little while after the officers broke in he breathed his last. He had bled to death!"

"How extraordinary."

"Wasn't it? You can't think what an excitement it created at the time, and especially among the quakers, who managed in some way to make out that he did not properly belong to their sect, but had only joined it in order to better carry out his designs, but they were glad enough to own him when he was rich and wanted to collect anything."

"I'll warrant that."

"But though he made so much stir, the recollection of him soon died away. I had even forgotten him myself, until your tales to-night put him into my head again."

"And so that was the end of the quaker highwayman?"

"Yes."

"Well, all I can say is, it is a first-rate tale, Jim; but, however, it's time we were off now."

"So it is."

"Good night all, then," said the three turnkeys who were released from duty, and as they spoke they left the cell.

The other three then sat down in the seats which they had occupied, and the same sort of thing went on.

But Jack Sheppard took this opportunity to throw himself down upon the rude pallet prepared for him.

He was tired and weary.

Besides, he wanted to think over his own concerns, though the tales he had heard had the good effect of making the time appear to pass away more quickly.

Flood and Blewitt were evidently anxious to drown thought, and certainly the means they took were best qualified to achieve this end.

Even now they were in a state of semi-intoxication.

But they continued to pour down their throats glass after glass of the hot liquor before them, until, at length, their boisterous mirth and mock joviality lapsed into silence.

Overpowered with drink, they sunk into a deep sleep, from which they did not awake till late the next morning. Jack slept, too, and for a long time also. His stomach was not used to excess of liquor, and what he drank produced a great effect upon him.

But he felt thankful when he learned that it was almost mid-day. There was all the less time to wait until his friends arrived and helped him to escape.

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD SUCCEEDS IN EFFECTING HIS SECOND ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.

A REMARKABLE contrast was afforded by Jack Sheppard and his two companions.

He felt cheerful, and even happy.

They, on the contrary—the artificial spirits which the drink had caused having evaporated—were moody, sullen, and despairing.

Jack was longing for the time to pass, and cared not how quickly one minute succeeded to another.

They, on the other hand, cursed and swore because they had not longer to live.

With two such characters the reader can feel but little sympathy.

Such wretches as they were deserved nothing but death.

They were not fit to live.

During their long and iniquitous career they had perpetrated a whole catalogue of crimes, the bare recapitulation of which would make any one shudder.

More drink was called for, which they drank with redoubled thirst, but Jack refused to take any of it.

He wished to keep his head as cool as possible, and his hand steady and ready for work.

The difference in the elapsion of time when one is anxious for it to pass, and when we are a little behind in what we have to do is very great, and must have been noticed by everyone.

Jack found it so, but at length the welcome news was brought to him that some friends of his were waiting to see him.

He could not forbear giving a glance round his person and at his two companions, so certain did he feel that he was then seeing the last of them.

Then, with a light heart, he sprang up the little flight of stone steps, and a moment afterwards stood at the grating.

Blueskin and Johnson were standing there, attired as they were the day before.

The former spoke first.

"Jack!" he said.

"Yes, what is it?"

"We are rather late, so you will have to be quick."

"Yes, yes. Give me the saw."

"Here it is."

"All right."

"But be careful how you use it. The turnkeys are about."

"Where?"

"In the ante-room."

"What are they doing?"

"Having their supper, I think. Something to eat and drink, at all events. Now, Joe," he added, turning to his companion, "how!"

Johnson obeyed by taking a handkerchief from his pocket, and pretending to cry.

Quickly and silently the saw was drawn backwards and forwards across the spike, having been fitted into the crevice made on the preceding evening.

The time they had chosen for attempting to carry out their enterprise was certainly best.

It was Saturday.

The hour was that just before the prison doors were closed.

The men, feeling that the day's work was over, were

generally in the habit of assembling in the little room set aside for their use, and here they were at the present.

Even the man on the lock had joined them.

Our friends had the lodge all to themselves.

To be sure, from where they sat, more than one of the turnkeys could see into it, and more than once they looked, but did not see that anything unusual was going forward.

The behaviour of Johnson, the landlord, was a finished piece of acting.

They had no idea that he was other than what he seemed.

Jack, too, from his daring, was rather a favourite with the prison officials, and therefore they were willing to allow the interview between himself and his two female companions to be as private as possible.

Great credit is due to Blueskin for having hit upon the idea of choosing female apparel for a disguise, since there was no other that would have been so well calculated to avert suspicion as that was.

Backwards and forwards, with a rapid, yet steady motion, went the little saw, and every time its teeth sunk deeper and deeper into the iron.

At length the spike was so far sawn through, that Jack thought it not worth while to continue it any longer.

Releasing the little tool which had been of so much service to him, he caught hold of the spike with his right hand.

Then putting out all his strength, he bent it backwards and forwards until it was broken off.

Now came the most difficult part of all.

His heart beat with painful quickness, but there was no time for hesitation.

Indeed every thing would depend upon the rapidity of their actions.

No sooner was the spike fairly broken off, than by the command of his companions, Jack climbed up the gate, and thrust his head and shoulders through the space between the other spikes.

There was only just room, and had he been bigger than he was he could never have got through, but he was remarkably slender.

With a great effort he got his arms through, and then his two companions caught hold of them and pulled him through.

A moment more, and he stood upon the stone floor of the lodge.

One obstacle, and a most formidable one, that interposed itself between him and freedom was overcome.

But scarcely had he fairly gained his feet, than one of the turnkeys in the ante-room got up off his seat, and came towards them.

Fortunately he was perceived by Johnson, who pushed Jack close against the grating, and stood before him, speaking as though he was on the other side.

Blueskin assisted him in this manoeuvre.

The turnkey evidently did not perceive that anything was wrong.

He paused just on the threshold of the ante-room, and said—

"Now, you women, make haste; we are going to close the doors. Time's almost up, you know."

Joe Johnson responded to this speech by an admirably-affected burst of grief.

"Oh! hold your row!" cried the turnkey, turning away. "Make haste and say good-bye, and stop that awful howling."

He then resumed his seat.

Jack had scarcely dared to breathe while this was taking place.

Discovery, indeed, seemed imminent.

But he was all right again directly.

"What next, Blue?" he whispered.

"Be quiet; don't speak so loud."

"Be quick, then."

"Stand where you are; I will slip across to the door. Look, the key is in the lock."

Jack did look, and by a rapid glance assured himself that the ponderous key of the outer door had been left sticking in the lock.

"Well—well."

"I will steal across, turn it rapidly, and fling the door open."

"I see."

"You must both, then, be prepared to rush out, and I will do the same. Do you understand?"

"Quite."

"Good, then."

"But which way are we to turn when we get outside?"

"I had forgotten. At the corner of Giltspur-street I have a horse and trap. Get in and drive off."

"And you?"

"I shall be there as soon as you are."

With these words Blueskin, having first looked into the ante-room, glided across the lodge to the front door.

He was unseen.

With great swiftmess, then, he seized the key, turned it round in the lock, and flung the door open.

Jack Sheppard and Johnson made one bound, and then rolled down the steps into the street together.

The noise they made at once attracted the attention of the turnkeys, who instantly guessed what had happened.

But ere they could reach the door, Blueskin, with great presence of mind, had withdrawn the key, and closing the door, locked it on the outside.

He heard a frantic howl of rage as they dashed themselves against it.

He did not wait, though, to see what they did. He was content in having succeeded in placing a barrier to immediate pursuit.

He could just distinguish the forms of his two companions flying before him, and that was all, for it was quite dusk.

But an immense commotion was taking place within the prison.

The huge bell, which was silent except when a fire took place, or a prisoner escaped, was tolled vigorously.

The alarm was spreading, and would soon be all over London.

Trampling feet could be heard along the streets.

But, knowing that their lives depended upon it, the three friends made their way at full speed in the direction of which Blueskin had spoken.

At the corner of Giltspur-street there, sure enough, was a horse and trap.

A boy was in charge of it.

With all speed they scrambled in.

Jack first.

Then Johnson.

They had to wait a moment for their companion, but he soon reached them, and got in at the back.

Johnson took the reins, and laid the whip with an unsparing hand over the horse's neck, which started forward at a breakneck pace.

But several loud shouts from the rear let them know they were both seen and pursued, while a loud cry was raised—

"Stop thief! stop thief!" which was taken up by every throat.

But, paying no heed to these cries, Johnson kept urging the animal to increased speed, while above all other sounds could be heard the loud tolling of the Newgate bell.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD IS UNABLE TO ELUCIDATE THE MYSTERY OF MARY MILLINER'S DEATH.

It is quite time now that we turned our attention to Edgworth Bess.

When Steggs had disposed of Mary Milliner in such a summary manner, and created so much consternation among Wild's men, he returned to her room, and locked himself in.

Then, in a few words, he gave Edgworth Bess an outline of what had taken place.

That Jonathan would, before long, pay a visit to that apartment, he did not for a moment doubt, and, therefore, he set about removing everything calculated to excite suspicion in the thief-taker's breast.

As we know, when Mary Milliner attempted the life of the poor heiress, Steggs had seized her wrist, but he was not able to prevent the weapon from descending.

He diverted it, however, and it had sunk deeply into the bed clothes, but without wounding Bess in the least.

Then he had struggled with the ferocious female, and, finding he could achieve a victory by no other means, bestowed upon her the same fate as she had intended for her imaginary rival.

He had next drawn her out of the room and flung her over the balusters.

So quickly was the whole of this performed, that the blood did not begin to flow from the wound to any great extent until she reached the bottom of the second flight of stairs.

Consequently, there was no trace to lead them to the chamber door, nor were there any stains within the chamber itself.

This Steggs assured himself of, and arranged the clothes so that the place where the knife had pierced them should not be noticed, unless upon a close examination.

Then he calmed the fair and much-excited prisoner as well as he was able, and gave her every assurance that he was her friend.

And, indeed, his actions had proved it.

Then he told her how necessary it was for him to conceal himself, and that, if he was found by the thief-taker, his life would be forfeited that moment; he also particularly cautioned her not to say a word if she was questioned, or seem to know anything of what had taken place, except having heard a noise.

To all this did Edgworth Bess give her consent, and promise to act accordingly.

It was, then, just at this moment, that Jonathan Wild reached the door of the room.

He thrust his key into the lock.

Steggs crawled under the bed.

The wards of the lock would not act just properly, probably in consequence of having been locked with a skeleton key.

It might have been owing also to Jonathan's excitement, but, be it what it might, he had to make one or two efforts before he could get the bolt back.

Then he flung the door open and strode in.

To all appearance, however, everything was well.

Edgworth Bess half sat up in bed when he entered, and then shrunk back again in undiguised terror and disgust.

It was no small satisfaction for Jonathan to see that his prisoner was there, and all right.

He breathed rather more freely.

"What is it?" he growled. "What does it all mean? Tell me at once."

"What?"

"What? The meaning of this noise!"

"Why should you ask me? I have only just been awake by it."

"True, I am a fool. There is nothing here. Nothing."

"Release me," said Edgworth Bess. "Release me. I have learned that I am in your house, but how I came here is a mystery beyond my comprehension. Release me, I beseech you."

"Pah! Be silent. You lose labour. Do you think, after the trouble I have taken, and the risks I have run to get you here, that I should be fool enough to let you go again? Oh! dear no."

Bess wept.

"I shall keep you here until you are well, and until you are of age. Then you shall be mine. Wholly mine. You and your possessions also."

"Not if I can help it," muttered Steggs, beneath the bed, but not loud enough to be overheard.

"Never!" said Edgworth Bess, boldly. "I do not fear you. Jack Sheppard will soon find where I am, and, not only that, a means of rescuing me."

"Ha! ha!"

A horrible and cold-blooded laugh it was, which seemed to curdle the blood in the young girl's veins.

What could it mean?

That was the question that instantly surged up in her mind.

She dreaded some ill to Jack.

But she concealed her terror.

"Ha! ha!" said Jonathan, again. "Jack Sheppard rescue you? Ha! ha!"

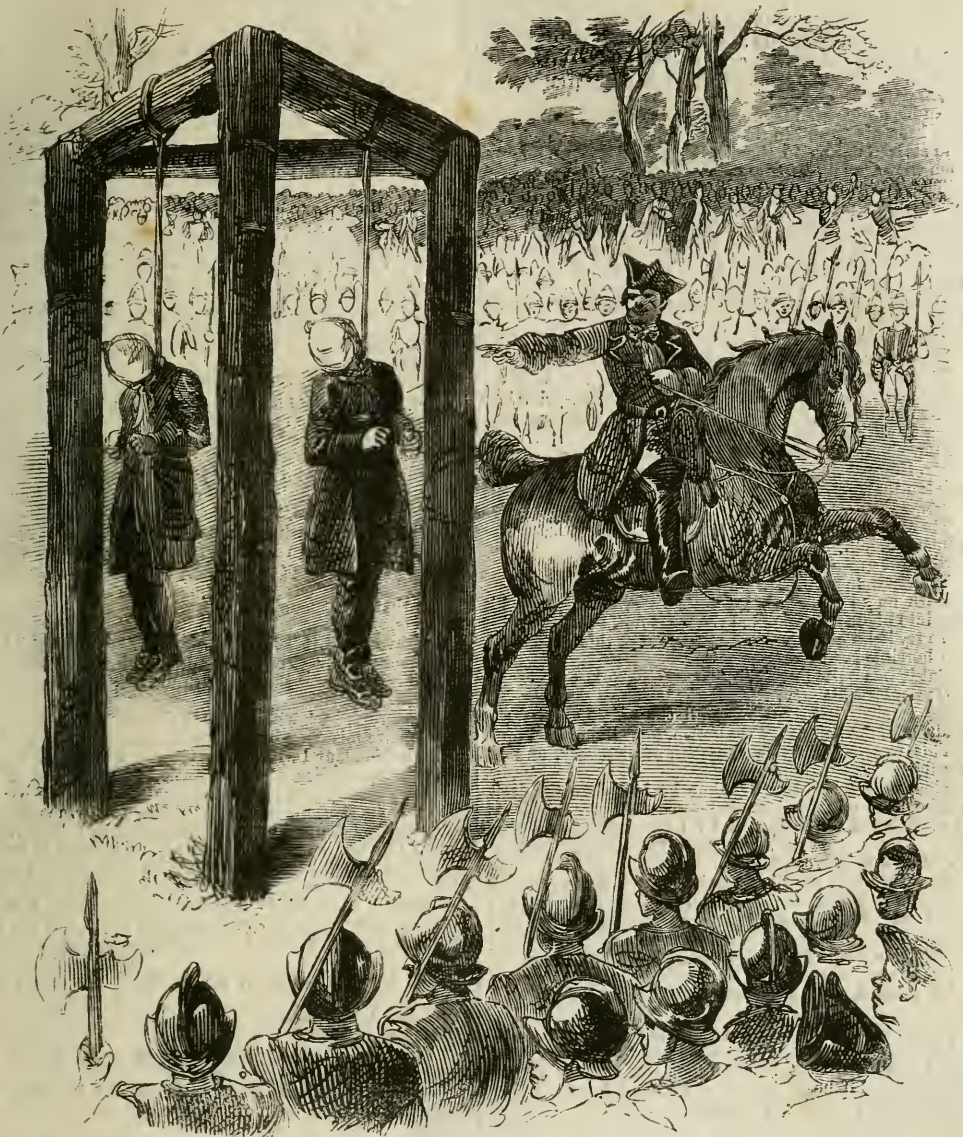
"Yes," said Bess, keeping down her agitation, and speaking with tolerable firmness. "He has rescued me before, and he will do so again."

"Ha! ha!"

Bess was silent.

She was unable to speak.

That horrible laugh had some meaning, doubtless as hideous as itself.



[THE EXECUTION OF FLOOD AND BLEWITT AT TYBURN.]

"It's very strange," said Wild, "but I had intended to come up and have a little talk to you about Jack Sheppard. Ha! ha!"

Bess was still silent.

"In fact, I was going to ask you whether you would feel obliged to me if I allowed you to see him?"

"See him? When? Where?"

"See him. Yes. What do you say?"

"You cannot be in earnest!"

"I am. Now, if you like, I'll tell you when you shall see him."

"When?"

"On Monday morning."

"On Monday?"

"Yes. To-day, as I daresay you know, is Friday; so you won't have long to wait."

"But where shall I see him?"

"Here, from one of my front windows."

"Will he be in the street, then?" asked the poor girl, innocently, for she had no idea what the villain meant;

but yet that it was something terrible she could surmise, both by the expression of his countenance and the manner in which he spoke.

"Oh! yes. Now, shall I be candid with you?"

"I do not understand you."

"Well, then, between ten and twelve o'clock next Monday morning, Jack Sheppard is going for a ride in an open carriage. You will be able to see him pass, and if you like you shall stand at the window."

"What do you mean?" asked the poor girl, bewilderedly, "what do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"But how do you know what he will do on Monday?"

"I do know it."

"I will not believe you."

"Well, you need not. Will you if you see him?"

"Speak plainly to me; you will kill me with suspense. Tell me, oh! tell me, what you mean."

She burst into an agony of weeping as she spoke.

Something whispered to her heart that Jack was in some great danger.

But of what kind?

She was at a loss to think.

"Calm yourself," said Jonathan, with a derisive grin; "and if you like you can comfort yourself that Jack will find you out and rescue you. I am not afraid of it. Good day."

In his anticipated triumph over Jack, Wild forgot what had been his errand to that room until he opened the door and stalked out on to the landing, where several of his men were standing.

They gazed at him inquiringly, and then he recollected what had happened.

Now it must not be supposed that it was out of regret for the loss of Mary Milliner that Jonathan was anxious. He would have been only too glad to get rid of her at any price.

But it was the mystery of her death that troubled him.

How could it have come about?

By whom could she have been slain?

Where was the assassin?

He searched his house from top to bottom—pried into all its numerous hidden nooks, but without learning anything to satisfy him.

How should the mystery be elucidated?

Mr. Snoxall was called in, who gave it as his deliberate opinion that the wound could not have been inflicted by her own hand.

There was no means of learning anything from the woman herself.

She was quite dead.

So Jonathan was thrown all abroad.

With an angry snarl, he, towards evening, made his way into his front room, and there sat down to think.

To try if he could make anything out of this mysterious and horrible event.

But it was quite in vain.

He doubted his men.

He fancied that they knew all the particulars of the affair, and, for reasons of their own, kept them from him.

This was the block in the path of discovery, and he stumbled over the obstacle.

Steggs knew it not at the time he had done the deed, but he could not have hit upon a means better calculated to unsettle the thief-taker, and fill him with alarm than that.

But he was in great danger.

Fortunately he was forgotten by his new master.

Steggs was by no means free from danger. If he was asked for, he would be in a very awkward predicament indeed.

Suspicion would be thrown upon him at once.

But Steggs was shrewd and long-headed.

He calculated correctly all the difficulties of his position.

He knew what there was to contend against.

He knew the best means to set about it.

We shall see now how he got out of his present dilemma, and if he is successful, we shall have a better opinion of his abilities in future.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

IN WHICH STEGGS CONVEYS TO EDGORTH BESS SOME INFORMATION RESPECTING JACK SHEPPARD.

So soon as he felt certain that Jonathan Wild had really left the room and gone downstairs, Steggs rose from his place of concealment, and looked with the utmost solicitude on the face of poor Edgorth Bess.

She was weeping bitterly.

Her heart told her that the thief-taker's hideous pleasantry concealed some deep villainy.

But what was it?

Something connected with Jack.

He was a prisoner.

But beyond that point her thoughts did not go, and so soon as she caught sight of Steggs bending over her, she sprang up to a sitting posture, and clasping her hands together, said—

"Friend! friend! You tell me you are my friend. Am I to believe you? Are you, indeed, such?"

"Show me in what way I can prove it to you, miss," replied Steggs, respectfully.

"Jack Sheppard."

"What of him?"

"Tell me—tell me! You heard what—what Wild said."

"Every word, miss."

"What does he mean? Oh! don't keep me in suspense. I cannot understand him. He promised that I should see Jack Sheppard."

Steggs groaned, and shook his head.

"Speak—tell me!" said the fair prisoner. "Tell me at once, I pray! Let me know the worst!"

"It's a bit of his devilment, miss. I thought you would have understood him. Prepare yourself to hear the worst. Jack Sheppard!"

"What—oh! what?"

"Is a prisoner!"

"Oh! heavens. Where is he confined? In this house?"

"No, miss."

"Where then?"

"In Newgate!"

The words fell like ice upon the young girl's heart.

"Newgate?" she repeated, mechanically, and shuddering as she pronounced the word, "Newgate?"

"Yes, miss."

"But of what is he accused?"

Steggs was again silent, and uttered another groan.

"Don't take on so," he said; "it's all Wild's doings."

"Oh! heavens! why is such a villain suffered to live?"

"That's more than I can tell you, miss; but he won't live much longer to persecute people if Reuben Steggs is spared."

"Is that your name?"

"It is, miss."

"I have heard it before. Jack mentioned it. Ah! I remember it now. You are no friend of mine. You are an enemy. You are the associate and accomplice of Lord Donnull."

Bess shrunk back with palpable abhorrence.

"You are mistaken in me," said Steggs, humbly. "I am your friend, and will prove it in any way you like. I was the accomplice of your uncle, and leagued with Jonathan against you; but they treated me badly—they tried to deprive me of my reward—that which alone prompted and tempted me to take the course I did. Wild played the treacherous villain to me, as he does to every one. But I shall be even with him—I shall be even with him!"

"Shall I trust you?" asked Edgorth Bess. "It is hard to have to doubt every one, and fancy you see an enemy in every face, but I have suffered enough to make me."

"Let my actions speak, miss. Did I not save your life?"

"You did, but!"

"But what, miss?"

"You might have done that out of no good feeling to me."

"I deserve this," said Steggs, "I deserve it. But, in spite of your bad opinion of me, I will prove myself your friend."

"I will take you at your word," said Edgorth Bess, after a brief pause; "if you deceive me, if you betray me, may heaven forgive you."

"Thanks! thanks!—will you believe me? I can tell you a great deal which will all serve to show that great an enemy as I once was against you, I am now devoted entirely to your interests."

"Say on, then. Tell me all you know; tell me, I beseech you!"

"Where shall I begin?"

"With Jack Sheppard. Tell me where he is, and explain Wild's extraordinary behaviour."

Steggs sighed.

"He is a prisoner in Newgate," he said.

"Of what is he accused, and who is his accuser?"

asked the poor girl, with a beating heart.

"I will answer your last question first. Four persons, and I count you and myself as two of them, have a common and a deadly enemy, who is all-powerful, and who will do his most against us."

"Mercy!"

"You know who I mean?"
 "I do."
 "The villain who has just left us."
 "Jonathan Wild?"
 "Even he. The other two, miss, are Jack Sheppard and Joseph Blake, or Blueskin, as he is often called."
 "Ah! yes, I know. I remember him. Where is he?"
 "Is he, too, a prisoner?"
 "No, miss, he is free, but in momentary danger of being captured. He is a firm true friend to you, and all in whom you take an interest."
 "I knew that."
 "That is well! Then he, too, is a friend of mine. We are linked together to achieve one object."
 "And that is?"
 "The downfall of the villain Wild, and, as a matter of course, your restoration to those rights which you have so long stood dispossessed of."
 "I believe you. Truth is in your face. I will trust you now entirely. Once more, then—tell me, and tell me freely, all you know about Jack Sheppard."
 "I would rather not, miss."
 "Why not?" And yet you call yourself my friend."
 "What shall I do?"
 "Prove that you are such by telling that which I want to know."
 "It is ill news."
 "You alarm me more by speaking as you do, than if you let me know the worst at once. Tell me, I pray you."
 "He is a prisoner, then, in Newgate. Wild has sent him there. He is accused of"—
 "What—what—oh! what?"
 "Robbery and"—
 "And what? Why keep me in this suspense?"
 "Murder!"
 "No—no. Impossible. I do not believe it. Will not. He is bad. He is guilty. I know that. But it is not his fault. Circumstances have conspired to cause it. This is but some deep malignity of Wild's. Has he been found guilty?"
 "I know not, but I fear so. Whenever Wild appears against a prisoner, he is sure to be condemned. His trial came on this morning."
 "Impossible."
 "It is true; and so, wishing to see you and assure you that even here you had a friend watching over you, I took advantage of his absence to ascend. As you know, I came just in time to save your life."
 "Who was that woman? But stop, before you tell me any more. Let me hear all about Jack Sheppard."
 "You know almost all now, except the better part of it. He was tried this morning, but I don't know the result. However, Blueskin and myself have determined to set him free."
 "Then there is hope."
 "Every hope; though Jonathan does not think so. He thinks that little matter quite settled. You must know that from some of the windows in this house a view of the top of the Old Bailey and a part of Snow-hill can be had, and on a Monday morning, when people are taken to be executed, they are placed in a cart and conveyed to Tyburn. Now, do you understand what Jonathan meant?"
 "Oh! heavens; is it possible for such inhumanity to exist?"
 "It seems so. But no villainy is too black for Jonathan."
 "And he really thought of showing him to me on his way to the scaffold. Heaven forgive him."
 "He has need of such a prayer. But he of good heart. Rely upon it, Blueskin will leave no means untried to effect his freedom. You know, too, that Jack is not one to give up merely because he is confronted by a few difficulties."
 "I know he is not. Nor is he one to commit a murder. I am sure he is innocent, at least of that."
 "Doubtless," said Steggs, compliantly, for he did not wish to anger her by dissenting to what she said.
 "What am I to do?" she said. "Would that I was at liberty."
 "That is Blueskin's wish, even more than your own; but, as Jack's case is the most urgent, he imagined that he should please you best if he turned his attention first to him."

"And he was right—quite right. When Jack Sheppard is free, then attempt my release. But, if he perishes, I shall not care to live."
 "But," said Steggs, hesitatingly, "you must not forget that you are a lady, both by birth and wealth, and—and—he—that is Sheppard—he—is—you understand—he"—
 "Cease. I know what you would say, but I shall not listen to it. When I was friendless—helpless—he generously stood my friend, and all that he has endured has been caused by me. Had he consented to assist Wild in his schemes, he would not now be the object of his hatred. We were equal when we first met, and nothing shall make me feel my position to be different to his when we are together, as I trust we soon shall be."
 "You are just," said Steggs, "but still I only wanted to remind you of that which I thought you had most likely forgotten."
 "No—no. But what shall you do? How shall you contrive to leave me?"
 "Let me manage that. As soon as I can I will learn the result of the trial, and see Blueskin. The next thing will be to let you know all that has taken place."
 "Do so—do so, and accept my earnest thanks."
 "You have faith in me?"
 "I have."
 "That is enough, but, ere I try to leave, I should like, if you will give me permission, to enter into some particulars, in order that you may not only comprehend my position, but your own at the same time."
 "Speak—speak!" cried Edgworth Bess. "I am impatient in the extreme to hear."

CHAPTER CLXXX.

THE PERILS OF STEGGS'S POSITION IN WILD'S HOUSE BECOME GREATER AND GREATER.

ENTREATING the poor girl to be calm, Steggs, at her request, drew a chair up to the bedside, and commenced the revelations to which he had alluded.

But as the reader is already in possession of all the facts which he had to communicate, it will be scarcely necessary to set down his words upon this occasion.

Let it suffice to say that he was as good as his word, and by making her understand his own peculiar position in Wild's household, he enabled her to comprehend her own, and the views and intentions of the villainous thief-taker.

He unfolded also his own plot against him, and showed her the extreme likelihood of its success, but, in spite of what he said, she trembled at the thought of the frightful amount of risk he would run.

To some extent, however, he reassured her.

At length, when he had finished, he prepared to leave. They parted with the mutual understanding that Steggs should take the first opportunity of letting her know what had happened.

And now came Steggs's greatest danger.

It would be impossible, however, for him always to stop where he was, and the sooner he got out the better.

Accordingly he unlocked the door with the skeleton key, and locked it after him as silently as he possibly could.

Creeping forward, then, he reached the head of the stairs, and ere he ventured to descend, looked down.

He more than half suspected that a man would be there to watch who ascended and descended the staircase.

Of course, if he was seen doing the latter, suspicion would immediately fall upon him.

His absence he had no doubt had already excited comment.

Peeping down, he saw that what he expected was really the case.

At the foot of the second flight of stairs, and near the spot where Mary Milliner had fallen, a man was stationed.

Steggs looked more closely, in order to ascertain who it was.

It was Wilkinson.

To go downstairs unseen by him was an impossibility. Then what was he to do?

His safest course, he knew, would be to get in at the front door, but then what means had he of gaining the street?

He did not know of the disused passage leading from

the back yard into Newgate-market, or he would have availed himself of that.

Clearly no good was to be got by descending, so he turned to the attic stairs.

Up these he crept as silently and stealthily as a cat.

The upper part of the house was tolerably familiar to him.

"If, now," he muttered to himself, "I could make friends with the people who live next door, all would be well. I must try it on. If I fail it can't be helped. I have no other chance."

What Steggs meant by making friends with the people next door will be very quickly seen.

As we have before stated, there was immediately above the landing at the top of the attic stairs, a trap-door opening on to the tiles, by means of which Jack Sheppard had once entered Wild's house.

It was out of his reach as he stood on the floor, but Steggs thought that by standing on the top of the massive balustrades, he should be just able to reach it.

He made the attempt, and found the feat practicable.

Carefully balancing himself, he pushed against the trap-door, to see whether it would open.

He quite expected to find it fastened in some way, and, therefore, it was an agreeable surprise for him when he found it yield before the pressure he applied to it.

He pushed it partially upwards and open, and caught hold of the edge with his hands.

Then, after numerous struggles, and by assisting himself against the walls, he managed to draw himself up, and finally crawled through the aperture.

He closed the trap-door carefully, and then glanced around.

Just before him was the roof of the huge city prison.

That was on the west side of Jonathan Wild's house.

On the east side was a house, similar in appearance to the thief-taker's, which was occupied by a shoemaker and his wife.

At least, they were the responsible tenants to the landlord.

How many more shared the occupancy of the premises with them it would have been hard to tell.

It was, in fact, a house let out in lodgings.

The shoemaker and his wife, and half a score of children occupied the basement.

The ground floor was let to another family, and so on, with the different floors above, so that there must have been, upon a moderate calculation, one hundred people in the house at least.

There are many such houses to be found in London today.

The traffic up and down the stairs was immense, so the front door was never closed except at night, in consequence of the continual going in and out.

All this Steggs had previously noticed before he ventured upon entering the thief-taker's employ.

His observation proved to be of service to him.

With great show of reason he calculated that if he could get inside the house he should be able to leave it unnoticed and unperceived.

The different lodgers must have visitors to see them occasionally, and they would of course be allowed to pass on unquestioned.

If he should be stopped he had two excuses ready to use as circumstances should require.

Stooping down, so as to be out of sight of any one in the street, he crept over the roof of Wild's house, and on to the one next to it.

Here was a trap-door just like the one he had just come through.

In fact, those two formed part of a row of houses which were built at the same time, and upon the same plan.

His chief danger, he felt, would be the contingency of any one seeing him make an entry into the house in so surreptitious a manner.

He placed his ear over the door and listened.

All was still.

He then tried to raise it a little, and, after some trouble, succeeded, for the rain had greatly swelled the wood-work.

When it was open about a couple of inches, he tried to peep down.

But all beneath was darkness.

He listened, but no indications of any persons moving about reached his ears.

Rapidly, then, and cautiously—for he did not know how soon this favourable condition of things would terminate—he opened the trap-door still wider, and pushed himself through.

Then dropped on to the landing.

He made a slight noise, of course, as his feet struck the boards, but still not much.

The landing had seemed in total darkness when he looked down from the light above, but now he found it was faintly illuminated.

Without pausing a moment, then, he crossed the landing to the head of the stairs, and descended them as fast as his legs would allow him.

He heard a door opened above, but he paid no attention to it, except that it served to make him accelerate his speed.

The staircase was dark and awkwardly constructed, but he made his way down it without falling.

The last flight was reached.

Another moment, and he would have been in the street.

But when he reached the bottom, he saw the landlord of the house standing at the front door, and leaning his back against the post in a lazy attitude.

From his appearance, Steggs came to the conclusion that he had been standing there for some time.

He knew he was in the habit of doing so for hours.

He might ask him a question.

Besides, he wished to keep out of his sight.

In the hope that he would move from his post, Steggs drew back to a dark corner of the stairs and waited.

Here the time passed slowly.

He could see the landlord, but to his intense aggravation, he made no offer to move.

He looked up and down the street with the listless air of one who has nothing whatever to do, and who knows not how to pass the time away.

How long he would have stood there is hard to say, but he was interrupted by a shrill voice, which came from the lower regions.

"Thomas!—Thomas! You idle, good-for-nothing lout, why can't you come to your dinner when it's ready for you?"

The landlord said not a word, but turned round, and submissively walked down stairs.

This was the moment Steggs seized upon, and he was out into Newgate-street like a shot.

And now arose the rather important question—should he take advantage, now he was out, of the opportunity of seeing Blueskin, and learning the result of the trial, or should he return at once to Wild's house.

After a little deliberation, he decided upon the former. He would make what haste he could, and it would not take him long.

Accordingly he directed his steps to Drury-lane, where he had little doubt he should find the person he wished to see.

When he reached the "Black Lion," Blueskin and the landlord were endeavouring to think of some plan by which Jack's release could be effected.

Here he learned the result of the trial, and, indeed, all he wished to know.

In his turn he communicated his own adventures in Wild's house.

But he could not stay for any lengthened conference.

On his return he was accosted by Tonks, who was, perhaps, less ill-disposed towards him than any other one of Wild's men.

"You have come in just in time," he said.

"Why?"

"Johnny's upstairs, and he has just called me to say he wants you."

"Humbly, yes," said Steggs. "I'll go up at once."

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

IN WHICH JONATHAN WILD PLAYS ENTIRELY INTO STEGGS'S HANDS.

TONKS looked up rather curiously after him as he ascended the stairs, and as he turned away, he muttered—

"I'm blest if I can make that chap out at all! I must keep an eye upon him to find out what he is arter."

Upon reaching the door of the thief-taker's room, Steggs tapped gently at it.

The usual growing summons to enter was heard, so he opened the door.

Steggs was careful to keep up the humble character he had assumed.

He stood in an attitude of great submissiveness waiting for the thief-taker to speak.

It is questionable whether he could have hit on any quality that would have so much recommended him to Jonathan.

"Get a chair," said Wild, after a moment's pause, "and sit down. I want to talk to you."

Steggs obeyed, but not without a great deal of misgiving.

"Can I trust you?" was Wild's first question, and as spoke he looked keenly in the face of this new member of his band. "Can I trust you?"

"I am your servant, Mr. Wild. Try me, if you please."

Steggs judged the thief-taker would be better pleased with this reply than if he had uttered no end of protestations as to his fidelity, and he was right.

"If you are willing to devote yourself entirely to my interests, to be faithful to me in everything, you shall be a rich man. I have wealth—incalculable wealth—but I have much to achieve, and I want some one upon whom I can rely to assist me. You shall have a share of that wealth of which I have spoken if you are content to do as I require."

"Yes, Mr. Wild. As I said before, let me know what I have to do, and you may depend upon its being done faithfully."

"Good! I have chosen you from the rest of my men because I distrust them all. Now, tell me, do you know how to solve the mystery of Mrs. Milliner's death?"

"No, Mr. Wild, I am sorry I don't; but I will try to find out."

"Do so, do so. Look, here are ten guineas. Take them as an earnest of the payment I shall award you if you do my behests and continue faithful."

He took ten guineas from his pocket as he spoke, and gave them to Steggs, who extended his hand to receive the coins.

"Many thanks, Mr. Wild. Oh! dear, I really do hope you will accept my thanks. Tell me what I am to do."

"Upstairs," began Jonathan, slowly, "on the second floor, I have a prisoner confined in one of the bedrooms."

Steggs nodded his head, assentingly, as though that was the first he had heard or knew about it.

"I wish her to be carefully looked after. I have my suspicions; but—no matter—no matter! Your first duty, you understand, will be to take up your position on the second landing, in front of the door which I will show you, and watch it attentively, taking care that no one goes in to see the prisoner but myself, and that the prisoner does not escape. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Wild, perfectly. You shall be obeyed, sir. Oh! dear, yes, you shall be obeyed."

"Look to it. You will find it no small advantage to have me for your friend. You would find me to be much dreaded as an enemy. You have only to be faithful to the trust I repose in you."

"When shall I commence this duty, if you please, Mr. Wild?"

"Now, at once. Keep a sharp look-out, and any little circumstance which may occur, and which seems suspicious, let me know of it."

"I will, Mr. Wild. You may depend upon me," said Steggs, rising.

"Let me caution you," said Wild "against treachery. If you are guilty of it, I shall be sure to detect you, sooner or later, and then woe be to you!"

Steggs shuddered involuntarily.

He had never heard the thief-taker speak so calmly before, and he fancied he had never known him to be so terribly in earnest.

It was strange to see how Wild favoured Steggs's views—played into his hands, in fact.

Muttering another sentence about obeying his commands to the letter, he withdrew.

He made his way upstairs at once, and took up his position before the chamber door.

Steggs was a man who felt always doubtful of success.

Here was the very thing he had been scheming to do placed in his grasp without the least trouble.

He would have felt better pleased if he had had difficulties and dangers to contend against before he secured his object.

He sat down on the stairs, and thought of his own situation—of that of the fair prisoner he had determined to set free—and the chances there were of his performing his ulterior designs.

All seemed favourable.

Fain would he have put an end to that suspense which he knew Edgworth Bess must be suffering, but he dreaded to be caught communicating with her.

He must wait.

He felt consoled that he should be there as a guard over her. He would not suffer any harm to come to her while he was able to defend her.

And so, watching and waiting, the long, weary night passed away.

Very early indeed, Wild came up to see the sentinel.

"Is all well?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Wild; I have kept watch all night, but no one has moved—nothing has happened."

"Be away as little as you can; I will take care to make it known among the men that you are here on this special service for me."

"Oh! dear. If you please, Mr. Wild, yes. They seem very unfriendly with me, indeed, and I shouldn't wonder if they don't invent all manner of tales about me." "Heed them not; they will have no weight with me. I know them well, the cowardly, villainous set. They all live in hopes of seeing me hanged some day, but I will take care they don't. Ha! ha!"

"But, Mr. Wild"—

"What?"

"You will excuse me"—

"What is it?"

"I have not had anything to eat since yesterday!"

"Ah! yes; I had forgotten that. Never mind, I will have some breakfast sent up to you at once. Have you thought over what I said to you last night?"

"I have, Mr. Wild."

"I have some great schemes in hand, but I cannot carry them out myself; I want some one who will serve me faithfully to assist me in them. That person will have for his reward a fortune."

"Oh! Mr. Wild."

"Yes, a fortune! Bear in mind, a fortune! You have the chance; let me see that you are faithful to me."

"I have not had an opportunity of proving it to you, Mr. Wild."

"I know that, but so far very good. I am satisfied. I have never yet found any one who would be true to me and my interests. It has been my fate to be betrayed by those whom I most trusted."

It seemed rather strange, but such, indeed, was the case.

Jonathan Wild had never had one person who was faithful.

And now, in the present instance, he was doomed to the same fate.

After a few more words of similar import, Jonathan descended the stairs.

Steggs was avaricious.

He could not help it.

It was a kind of instinct firmly implanted in his breast, and which nothing would be able to eradicate.

When the thief-taker had left him, he sat down on the stairs again, and, covering his face with his hands, he muttered—

"What shall I do? Is Jonathan sincere? He seems so—suppose I was to trust him. Suppose I threw myself heart and soul into those schemes which he alone has power to form, and which could be better carried out by two than one. I know not, I know not. A man ought to look after his own interests. The question is, is Jonathan sincere? If I could once be sure upon this point I should know how to act. As it is, I am bewildered."

Steggs was silent.

Presently the man came up with his breakfast, and this interrupted his chain of thought, for he was all but starving, so many hours had elapsed since he had taken food.

The man who brought the meal put down the tray without a word.

The reader can see the danger in which, even *W*, Edgworth Bess was placed.

Steggs was one who had no fixed notions of good and evil. There are many others like him, who are anxious only to secure their own good, even if it be at the expense of another's detriment.

The motives which had led him to espouse the cause of Edgworth Bess were not so much a desire to see her reinstated in her rights, as it was to be revenged upon Jonathan Wild and Lord Donnull.

But, upon coming before the thief-taker, he had found him willing to reward him, and that in a most liberal scale, for serving him.

He had already ten guineas in his pocket as an earnest of what was to come.

Over and over again did he ask himself the question—

"Is Jonathan sincere?" and from the manner in which he uttered it, it could be told, that he only wanted to be assured of that fact, to devote himself wholly and solely to his interests.

We tremble when we think of the awful position in which those three persons are cast in whose fortunes we feel so deep an interest, and all through the avarice of a man who, they believed, was really in earnest in his desire to help them.

Should he join Wild, alas! for Edgworth Bess. She would have no room to hope.

Blueskin, too, and Jack Sheppard, would quickly fall into his clutches, and be ruthlessly disposed of.

But leaving Steggs to weigh over this question in his mind, and come to some decision, we will turn our attention to the doings of the great thief-taker himself.

After leaving Steggs, he went over to the eating-house in Giltspur-street, where, having dispatched a hearty meal, he returned to his office, and settled down to the ordinary business of the day.

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

JONATHAN WILD DISCOVERS THAT JACK SHEPPARD HAS ESCAPED, AND PURSUES HIM WITHOUT DELAY.

THE tolling of the alarm-bell was the first indication Jonathan received that Jack Sheppard had escaped.

As soon as he heard the ominous sound he started to his feet, with a tremendous oath upon his lips, and listened.

Room—boom—boom!

The sound rose above all the other din of the noisy city.

"What is it?" he cried. "Curses! Is it fire? or is it an escape? No—no. Not that—not that."

He listened again, and found what he most dreaded to hear realized.

It was not fire.

There were only two occasions when the huge alarm-bell was rung.

One was for fire.

Another was when a prisoner had escaped.

But, if the bell had rung forth for the former reason, there would have mingled with its alarm the awful cry of "Fire."

That cry, however, did not come to Wild's ears.

All he heard was the murmur of voices.

He threw up the window with a crash.

Then those cries which had before been indefinite and indistinguishable could be plainly heard.

"Stop thief! Stop thief! Stop them! An escape! Break jail! An escape! There they go! Stop thief!"

"A thousand curses," yelled Jonathan Wild, bringing the window down, and putting on his hat. "A thousand curses! Jack Sheppard has made a second escape!"

More like a madman than a sane being, he rushed down the stairs.

"Open the door, fool!" he yelled to the man on the lock. "Get a dozen horses saddled at once, and call men to ride them. Let them be well armed."

So saying, he sprang through the door, and alighted on the pavement, without touching any of the steps in his course.

On reaching the corner of the Old Bailey, he was met

by a throng of people, who were all going in a contrary direction to himself.

But he did not care. He fought his way through like a maniac, and he forced the people to give way before him.

Panting—breathless—and almost exhausted, he reached the lodge of Newgate.

He endeavoured to buoy himself up with the hope that it was some other prisoner who had escaped, not Jack Sheppard.

Should it be so, how glad he would feel. He would not stir an inch to assist in his recapture.

"Who—who has escaped?" he asked. "Who has escaped? Tell me—tell me! Where is the governor?"

"Here," said a voice, and Mr. Noakes, in a state of the utmost bewilderment, elbowed his way forward.

"Who has escaped?"

"Jack Sheppard!"

"Jack Sheppard?" yelled Wild, although he had fully anticipated what the reply would be. "Jack Sheppard? A thousand curses!"

"Look here!" said the governor, and, as he spoke, he showed where Jack had broken off the spike.

The thief-taker understood all at once.

He did not wait to hear any more.

Every moment was taking his prey further and further away from him.

He dashed out of the lodge again, and fought his way to the door of his own house.

Here he found the horses waiting, and his men mounting.

"Quick," he screamed at the top of his voice, for he had never been in such a state of excitement before. "Quick. Mount, all of you, and follow me. Have your pistols ready in your hands. Jack Sheppard has escaped!"

Uttering these words, he sprang on to the back of the horse which had been provided for his use.

He looked round him.

The direction in which the people were running afforded him a pretty good idea of the direction which the prisoners had taken.

That was up Giltspur-street into Smithfield.

He had no spurs on, but he dashed his heels violently against the horse's sides, and was round the corner like a shot.

In a disorderly throng the men followed.

Their hoofs made a tremendous clatter, and the people opened, and allowed them to pass through unimpeded.

Across Smithfield and up St. John's-street went Wild, at the very top of his speed.

He soon reached the foremost rank of those on foot, and he could tell by their cries that the fugitives were not much further in advance.

This urged him to make fresh exertion.

When Blueskin got into the cart, it will be remembered Johnson already had the reins in his hands, and he drove off at once.

Blueskin's first act was to disencumber himself of the female apparel which he had on, and which proved a great hindrance to his movements.

This did not take long, nor did it give him much trouble.

He flung the bundle into the street.

Then he took from his pocket a brace of pistols, and got them ready for immediate service.

These he placed in Jack's hands.

Then, taking two others, he prepared them in the same manner, reserving them for his own use.

And now the sounds of pursuit became more unequivocal.

Johnson lashed the horse furiously, and they tore along at a terrific speed.

It was not, however, it must be understood, the people who first gave the alarm who kept up with them. They could not have made speed enough.

But the alarm travelled.

The cry passed from mouth to mouth, and was taken up with a rapidity that was really astounding.

From every house, from every alley, and every street, the people poured in countless shoals.

Despite his efforts, Johnson could not make the horse out-distance these.

It was a fleet, long-winded animal, too, and it got over the ground at a most prodigious rate.

But now they heard loud cries and shouts in their rear, showing that something fresh had taken place.

Then followed the clattering of horses' hoofs. Clearer—clearer, louder and more distinct, became the sound.

They looked back.

The crowd of people parted right and left.

Then through the channel which was thus made, came a troop of horsemen.

It was fancy at first which made them think the foremost rider was Jonathan Wild, but they soon found that it was really him.

They heard the loud tones of his disagreeable voice, now hoarse with continued shouting.

They saw him wave his arms in an excited manner to his men.

That they were gaining on them was quite evident.

Blueskin cocked the pistols, and quietly told Jack to do the same.

Johnson gave all his attention to the horse.

But in spite of all his efforts he could not make it go at the same rate as those which had to carry men upon their backs, instead of having to draw a cart containing three people after it.

Still the rate it went, at was really astonishing.

Neither Johnson nor Blueskin had anticipated so sudden and energetic a pursuit. They were in hopes of getting to a distance before the escape was discovered.

However, there was nothing left to do now but to fight for their lives and liberties.

"Halt!" cried Wild, as soon as he found himself near enough to be heard. "Surrender, I say! It is in vain to fly. Surrender, or I fire!"

Of course no notice was taken of this speech, except that Johnson gave the horse a few more cuts with the whip to make him go faster.

But Jonathan was as good as his word.

They saw him raise his arm.

Then there was a bright flash and a report.

He fired.

But the shot was aimless, and the bullet flew high above their heads.

"Shot for shot!" exclaimed Blueskin.

He levelled one of his pistols as he spoke, and fired.

Being in a cart, he had a much better chance of taking a correct aim at anything than Wild had on horseback.

But still the shot did not seem effective.

Jonathan did not slacken his speed in the least.

He was now most alarmingly close behind them.

His troop of men, too, were closing up.

Blueskin had not noticed Jack.

He had crouched down in the back of the cart.

He held in his hand one of the pistols he had received.

He was resting the barrel of it on the backboard of the cart, and endeavouring to cover his old foe.

When he had a good aim, he determined to fire, and so rid himself for ever of his implacable and barbarous enemy.

For a long time, owing to the jolting of the cart, he found his attempt an unsuccessful one.

But he got accustomed to the motion, and besides, they were in a smoother bit of road than any they had yet had.

Feeling certain that the pistol covered the whole body of his enemy, he fired.

At the same moment he pulled the trigger, or so it seemed to him, Wild swerved slightly in the saddle, and he fancied he heard him utter a cry of pain.

But about this last he was not quite sure.

Suddenly Jonathan raised his arm and fired again.

But his shot went wide of the mark, for at that moment he threw up his arms with a yell of pain, and after swaying for a moment from side to side upon his horse, he fell headlong to the ground.

Whether by accident, or whether by design, at any rate his feet were disengaged from the stirrups, for as he fell with a crash into the roadway, his horse galloped on without him.

This put a moment's stop to the pursuit, a very great thing for our friends, since it enabled them to increase the distance between them and their pursuers.

The country had now been reached, and on both sides of them were meadows and hedgerows, which make an English landscape so enchanting.

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

FLOOD AND BLEWITT RECEIVE THEIR JUST DUE, AND ARE EXECUTED AT TYBURN.

JONATHAN WILD's men, when they perceived their leader fall headlong into the roadway, pulled up at once.

That was their first impulse, though they did not know whether they should be acting rightly by so doing.

They raised him up.

He groaned slightly, and then fell into a state of insensibility or death.

Which it was his men could not tell. There was not one, perhaps, who did not wish it was the latter, but they all doubted, because they had a deep-settled conviction that Jonathan would die at Tyburn.

What to do was a question they asked each other, without being able to elicit a reply.

While they were deliberating and undecided, the fugitives had got out of sight and hearing.

At length they resolved to construct a kind of litter or bier, using whatever came readiest to the hand for that purpose.

On this they placed their helpless leader, and four carried it along.

Blood flowed in great quantities from two wounds.

One was in the breast.

The other in the head.

Without the least signs of life, he lay, an inert mass, just where his men placed him.

It was not long before they met those who were following on foot.

It was deemed desirous to avoid these if possible, so the janizaries and their burden took an abrupt turn to the left.

They had not gone far in this direction before they saw shining in the distance one of those red lamps which were then invariably hung before the doors of surgeons.

Seeing this, a couple ran on first to call the man up, in order that Jonathan's wounds might be attended to at once.

By the time they had explained the nature of their errand, those who carried the body of the thief-taker arrived.

Here his wounds were dressed, during which operation Jonathan recovered from his swoon.

But it was only a partial regainment of his senses, for his memory did not come back to him.

The surgeon, fearing some violence which might make the wound even more dangerous than it was already, administered a powerful opiate, which had the effect of sending him to sleep at once.

Then, by the direction of the surgeon, he was taken to his own house in Newgate-street, and placed in bed.

Here he remained during the rest of the night, and the whole of the next day and night succeeding.

It was not until Monday morning that he awoke.

In the meantime the utmost consternation took place in Newgate.

The governor was like a madman.

The various officials by whose negligence Jack's escape was greatly assisted shook in their shoes.

All London rang with the fame of the youth who had twice, and with so short an interval between, broken out of the strongest prison in the kingdom.

It would not be going too far to say that in every house in the metropolis it furnished the subject for conversation.

No time had elapsed for any notice to be taken of it by the government, though all knew a rigid investigation would be the result.

Jonathan's mishap, too, was much spoken of.

The prisoner and his accomplice had not been secured.

But while the officials in the prison were so fearful of the consequences of what had taken place, they had become, extra vigilant.

Blewitt and Flood were most closely watched.

They heard of the escape of their companion with mortification and regret.

They had become almost reconciled to their fate so long as they thought Jack was going to share it with them, but now he had escaped they were discontented.

They were violent, too, and they had the greatest trouble to keep them in order.

So Sunday passed.

Monday came.

At a very early hour the people began to assemble in front of the prison, for although a hanging in those days was a by no means unusual sight, yet there were special events connected with this one which made it of peculiar interest.

At Tyburn, too, the people collected in great numbers, and by the time appointed for the procession to start, there was quite a line of people all along the Oxford-road, from the prison to the place of execution, which was about two miles distant.

The sheriffs and the governor whispered together, and talked over Jack's extraordinary escape.

The place where he had broken the spike off and squeezed through, was pointed out to them, but the aperture was so contracted that they could scarcely bring themselves to believe that it was possible for a human being to get through, however lithe and agile he might be.

The governor tried all he could to conciliate the sheriffs, for he dreaded that one of the results of the inquiry which would be made respecting the escape would be his own dismissal.

He felt very thankful that Jonathan was incapacitated from attending.

From him he had everything to dread. He knew how particularly he had set his heart upon having Jack hanged that very Monday morning.

He could, of course, justly or unjustly, lay all the fault upon his shoulders.

He gave a sigh of satisfaction when he thought how remarkably safe he was in bed, unable to stir, and set about superintending the hanging preparations with a better heart.

But he would not have felt quite so inspired if he had been able to take a peep at the celebrated thief-taker at that very moment.

He had woke up.

Woke up for the first time since his mishap, with a clear memory and perfect recollection of what had taken place.

He was thinking things over, and wondering how long he had lain there, and whether Jack had been recaptured, when his attention was directed to the door, which some one opened quietly.

In another moment, and treading as though he had eggs beneath his feet, Mr. Snoxall crept into the room.

He was surprised to find his patient awake, and staring at him in a manner that proved, beyond doubt, he was restored to consciousness.

Jonathan raised himself up in bed a little, and then in a very serious voice, he asked—

"What is to-day, Mr. Snoxall?"

"To-day?"

"Yes. What day of the week is it?"

"Monday, Mr. Wild."

"Monday?" shrieked the thief-taker. "Monday? What is the time?"

The apothecary took from his fob an enormous silver watch, and said—

"Ten minutes to ten, Mr. Wild."

The impatience and anxiety with which Jonathan waited for this reply cannot be conceived.

But when he heard it a hideous grin overspread his features, as he replied—

"Ah! then, I am in time. I won't be cheated of that, at least."

"In time for what?"

Wild made no reply.

He jumped out of bed.

"Murder!" cried the apothecary: "Murder!"

"Hold your row! Give me my clothes!"

"But, Mr. Wild—"

"Give me my clothes!"

"But consider."

"Jonathan made such a ferocious grimace at this moment, that Mr. Snoxall ceased to make any further remonstrance.

He did as he was desired.

In a very short time Jonathan was fully attired.

The wound in his breast was not a serious one, being little more than skin deep.

The bullet was almost spent when it reached him, and it had just glanced against his ribs.

But the one in his head, and which had produced his insensibility, was another affair

It was of a most formidable and dangerous character.

But it had been skilfully treated, and Wild was one who soon recovered from an injury.

The wound was going on most favourably, but Mr. Snoxall dreaded this sudden excitement.

Jonathan had it redressed, but would suffer no bandage to be placed over it. It was simply strapped up with plaster.

His head was quite bald, which was to some extent an advantage, so far as healing the wound went.

This done, he put on his wig and hat.

He was now quite dressed, and, at first sight, looking none the worse for the fearful injuries he had received.

It was one of Jonathan's ideas to try and make himself appear invulnerable, and he often kept up the appearance at the expense of great bodily pain.

In the present instance, although he carried things off with a high hand, he felt far from well.

He left the bed, soon followed by Mr. Snoxall, and descended the stairs.

When he reached the hall below, however, such a frightful feeling of weakness came over him that he almost sank to the ground.

But he rallied himself, and called for brandy.

Mr. Snoxall was horrified.

He gave his patient up for lost.

Quilt Arnold brought him a tumbler full of brandy, from a cupboard in the office, where a good supply of the spirit was always kept.

Jonathan drank half of it off at a draught.

He did just pause then to draw breath, but that was all.

One more gulp, and the remainder disappeared.

He felt giddy and sick for a moment afterwards, but the factitious vigour which the brandy induced was soon apparent.

His eyes gleamed with unnatural lustre.

"My horse!" he cried, "my horse! Fetch him! Quick!"

Tonks darted off to execute this commission.

In a few moments he returned, to say that the horse was at the door waiting.

Jonathan walked along the passage with a tolerably steady step, and mounted.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD RIDES TO TYBURN AS PART OF THE PROCESSION, AND WITNESSES THE EXECUTION OF HIS TWO FOLLOWERS, FLOGG AND BLEWITT.

THE first thing that attracted Wild's notice, after he mounted, was the immense crowd of people which he could see stretching before him down Snow-hill.

Then, immediately afterwards, his ears were assailed by a cry which he had heard too often, and knew too well, not to understand.

The cry came from the mob.

It signified that the procession was about to start.

Griming in a more ghastly and hideous manner than before, Jonathan guided his horse to the top of the Old Bailey.

Not without difficulty, he drew his heavy cutlass from its sheath.

The people made way for him.

He was known.

His appearance was greeted by some with a cheer.

By others with a loud yell of derision and hatred.

But, paying attention to neither of these, for Wild knew how to estimate the opinion of a mob assembled on hanging mornings, he contrived to force his way down the street until he joined the procession.

He nodded in a friendly and semi-respectful manner to the sheriffs.

He scowled at the governor, who felt remarkably uncomfortable at seeing him abroad so soon.

Still Jonathan pushed on till he came to the cart in which the two prisoners were seated.

Then he wheeled his horse round and walked by the side of it.

His eyes gleamed with baleful triumph, and the two men, after one glance, turned away, unable to bear that basilisk-like gaze.

And so the procession went on—and on.



THE HORSE FALLS EXHAUSTED ON THE ROAD, TO THE DESPAIR OF JACK AND HIS FRIENDS.

Round the corner of the Old Bailey into Skinner-street, down Snow-hill, and up the opposite steep ascent.

It was customary to make a pause for a moment or so at this place, in order that the horse who drew the cart might recover a little from his exertion.

But the hangman, who was driving, soon whipped him up again, for as he glanced up to the clock of St. Andrew's Church, he saw that they were already a little behind time.

The immense and densely-packed mob hooted and yelled, and hissed, as they usually did upon such occasions.

The procession was of tolerable length.

But those in the van had no small difficulty in forcing a passage through the compact and living mass.

It was not that they did not shrink from the horses' hoofs, or the cutlasses of the officers, but the pressure was so great that they could not retreat.

When they had passed the end of Gray's Inn-lane, however, the crowd was very much thinner.

But this was only felt by those in advance, for as the procession moved, the people walked with . . .

The jollity and bravado which Flood and Blewitt had exhibited in the condemned hold had quite departed now.

Moodily—their eyes bloodshot, and their heads bent down upon their bosoms, they listened to the exhortations of the chaplain who, attired in full canonicals, sat on the opposite side of the cart.

But the voice of the man of God could barely be distinguished above the din of the crowd, who kept up a perpetual roar.

There was very little, if any sympathy felt for the two men in the cart.

Had Jack been there, according to Wild's intention, the case might have been very different.

On—the dismal procession forced its way.

Holborn was passed, and St. Giles's reached.

In the High-street was a public-house, which was stated to be half way between Newgate and Tyburn.

At this public-house, from time immemorial, it had

been customary for the procession to halt for a few minutes for refreshment.

A bowl of punch, provided by the landlord, was brought out, which was held to the lips of the condemned men, some of whom barely tasted it, while others would drink a large quantity.

This custom was not departed from in the present instance.

All came to a halt.

At this place the pressure was awful, for people who wished to have a good view of the prisoners, had taken up their stations there hours before.

The police-officers, however, cleared a space, and ranged themselves round it in a circle.

The bowl of hot steaming punch was brought out.

The landlord of the public-house carried it.

He held it aloft.

The people gave a loud cheer.

Blewitt was nearest, so he had the punch presented to him first.

He drank with avidity, and was repeatedly cheered by the populace for so doing.

Then it was handed to Flood, who made an attempt to swallow a mouthful, but failed.

The poor wretch was completely overcome by the immediate prospect of that death which he had so often seen inflicted upon others.

The people hissed.

This seemed to revive him a little, and he looked round with lack-lustre eyes.

Then he made another effort to drink.

But with no better success.

Finding this to be the case, and stimulated by the quantity of the hot beverage of which he had previously partaken, Blewitt uttered an awful oath, and asked for the remnant.

Then, amidst vociferous cheering, he swallowed the whole—drained the bowl to the dregs.

The landlord, admiring his pluck, held up the empty vessel with the bottom uppermost, upon which he tapped with his fingers, to signify that it was empty.

There was another cheer, and then the order was given for the procession to resume its march.

Up the narrow crooked High-street they went, then the refuge of the lowest of the low, and the haunt of the most vicious persons in all England, and round the corner into Oxford-road they went.

No shops and houses then lined the spacious street. It was a country high-road, with gardens and meadows on either side.

Keeping steadily along this, and going at a better speed, they at length approached their destination.

Long before the gallows itself was in sight, they could tell by the shoals of people which they met.

All round the ill-omened spot, a crowd denser than any through which they had forced a passage, had congregated.

Through this they would never have got, had not a body of officers, mounted on horseback, kept a kind of lane for them to pass through.

Seated as they were, the wretched prisoners could not see in advance without turning their heads.

The gallows came in sight.

That strangely formed instrument of execution, the like of which has been seen by few now living, with its three triangularly placed upright pieces of timber and transverse beams.

But though they did not look, they could tell it was in view.

The hoarse cries of the people told them that.

Besides, the different objects on the road were familiar to them, and they knew the spot from which the first view of the gallows could be obtained.

At length the procession passed through the two ranks of police-officers of which we have spoken.

They had occupied that position since daybreak.

As the procession passed through, they turned in, and formed part of it.

Jonathan still rode by the side of the cart.

He had not once moved from that position after taking it.

There was a clear space all round the scaffold.

It was kept by a body of halberdiers, who stood two

deep, and formed as firm a barrier to the crowd as a wall would have done.

This open space was reached.

The chaplain grew more earnest in his exhortations.

Blewitt, however, maddened by the fiery drink he had swallowed, broke out into a song, the burden of which was taken up by the mob.

He had resolved to die game.

But Flood, who all his life had been so blustering a bully, was quite weighed down.

He seemed already like one dead—very certain it is that he was quite unconscious of what was taking place around him.

The cart was driven beneath the fatal beam.

The horse, who had been well trained to his work, stopped of his own accord.

The executioner stood up, and was received with that awful howling cry with which the dread functionary of the law is always greeted.

Unmoved, however, by this demonstration of popular dislike, the hangman drew deliberately from his pocket two small white bundles.

He unrolled them one after the other, and then it could be seen what they were.

They were the white caps which are drawn over the faces of the condemned, in order to hide the convulsions produced by strangulation.

Flood and Blewitt were already pinioned.

They were forced to stand up in the cart.

The white caps were drawn down over their faces.

An officer supported Flood, or he would have fallen.

At this awful moment, when he stood upon the threshold of another world, and when the horror of his position would, one would have thought, been most deeply felt, Blewitt moved his feet about, and endeavoured to dance in the bottom of the cart.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

RELATES WHAT TOOK PLACE AFTER THE EXECUTION OF WILD'S TWO JANIZARIES

It was a horrible and disgusting spectacle.

The chaplain turned away his head.

But the mob, when they perceived what was taking place, applauded him.

The sounds reached the ears of the deluded ruffian, and he continued his dance with greater energy.

It was the hangman who put a period to the performance.

He shook Blewitt roughly, and then his assistant slipped a rope round his ankles, and forming it into a running noose, drew it tight.

He was then securely pinioned and quite helpless.

The expression of his face could not be seen, and so no tongue can tell what the odd-shaped cap covered.

The ropes had been fixed to the fatal beam in readiness.

Long practice had imparted dexterity to the hangman's movements, and he, with great rapidity, seized one of them, and hastily tied the noose under his neck.

The same operation was performed upon Flood, who had not recovered from his state of stupor and then the preparations were complete.

Like some grim spirit of evil Jonathan Wild stood beside the cart.

He had eyes for nothing save the two men.

The immense crowd of people, the authorities, all and every one in fact, were unheeded by him.

Not a single movement that they made escaped his watchful gaze.

When all was ready, and the chaplain had left the cart, the hangman and his assistants descended.

The latter walked to the horse's head, for the reader must understand that the men about to be hanged were not standing upon a platform of any kind, but in the bottom of the cart.

The assistant then took a thick-thonged whip from the place where he had stuck it between the shafts.

He struck the horse a sharp blow with it, and then drew him forward.

The cumbrous wheels belonging to the vehicle revolved.

The doomed men felt all that interposed between them and death slipping from beneath their feet, and they powerless to prevent it, though several convulsive move-

ments which they made showed how they endeavoured to do so.

With a rumbling sound the cart was drawn quite away, and then all that was left was two pendant figures hanging from two of the triangular-shaped beams.

But the ceremony was scarcely over.

It would have taken some time for the men to have strangled themselves by their own weight alone, so to put them out of their misery, the hangman seized them by the legs in rapid succession, and hung with his whole weight.

A few convulsive shudders followed, and then all was over.

Limp and inanimate their bodies floated idly in the breeze, which was just strong enough to make them move to and fro.

Jonathan Wild, as soon as the deed was fully accomplished, raised his hand, and pointing towards the lifeless forms, cried—

"Three groans for the murder of John Roots!"

His words were caught by the foremost in the crowd and instantly responded to, and the cry was at length taken up by the whole of the assemblage.

Upon this, the governor of Newgate, who had kept as much out of Wild's sight as possible, drew near.

Jonathan greeted him with an angry scowl.

Mr. Noakes observed it, and wished he had kept back, but he could not retreat, so he said—

"Mr. Wild! Mr. Wild!"

"Well?"

"I trust you don't bear me any malice for what has occurred."

"Why not?"

"It was not my fault, nor the fault of any one in Newgate. I wanted him hanged quite as much as you."

"Bah!"

"You might believe me, Mr. Wild."

"You should have taken more care."

"I took every care."

"It does not look like it."

"Who would have suspected it? I never should; and whether you like to believe me or not, the turnkeys, who were sitting at the other end of the lodge, were talking about his former escape, and saying how necessary it was for them to be vigilant."

"And yet he escaped again?"

"He did, and I can't make out how. I should say it was impossible for any one to have squeezed through so small a space."

"Well, well, Mr. Noakes," said Jonathan, whose blood-thirsty spirit must have been to some extent appeased by what had just taken place, "it is no good there being any ill blood between us; we shall get on best if we continue friends. As for Jack Sheppard, the only way that you can atone for his escape is to recapture him with as little delay as possible."

"I have tried my best to do that, Mr. Wild, and it will be strange indeed if I do not succeed."

"Do so—do so. Both Jack and his accomplices would have been safe ere now had it not been for the wound I was unlucky enough to receive. I feel it now—I feel it now."

The thief-taker reeled in the saddle as he spoke, and, perhaps, would have fallen to the ground, had not his friend, the governor, lent him his assistance.

Jonathan was giddy.

But by an effort he mastered the feeling.

"You came out too soon, Mr. Wild," said the governor, "and now you are suffering for it."

"No, no. It is nothing. I am all right now. It was just a little giddiness, that was all."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Enough, Mr. Noakes. On this spot, and in sight of those two villains yonder, I swear that I will take no rest until Jack Sheppard swings there like they do. It will not be long before I keep my oath, for I have many important matters to attend to; but revenge sets them every one aside, and must be the first gratified."

"You will, then, take the matter personally in hand, and quite independent of what the government may do?"

"Certainly; and, as I have the strongest motive to urge me on, I shall be almost certain to succeed."

"I shall try to beat you, Mr. Wild; but there is no need for us to stay here any longer, without you wish to

see the crowd disperse; and if you wait for that, you will have to stay here some time; and look, the sheriffs are going."

"We will follow them, Mr. Noakes."

The governor was well pleased to find Jonathan so amicably disposed towards him, and the pair joined the procession, which was then in the act of leaving.

The governor kept close to the side of the thief-taker, endeavouring to still further conciliate him.

By the time they reached the Old Bailey, they were quite good friends.

Jonathan repaired to his own house. He had carried things off pretty well, but he was in such a state of exhaustion that he could scarcely support himself in the saddle.

Quilt Arnold heard him arrive and opened the door.

He saw his master swaying backwards and forwards in imminent danger of falling.

He ran down the steps at once, and assisted him to alight from his steed.

Then he half carried him into the house.

Just as they entered the hall, Mr. Snoxall, who had been up to see his patient, descended the stairs, and a meeting took place.

Jonathan's countenance was ghastly in the extreme.

"Brandy!" he gasped; "give me brandy!"

"I told you how it would be," exclaimed Mr. Snoxall; "I knew very well what would be the result! Now take my advice, Mr. Wild—"

"Bah! silence! Brandy, I say."

Quilt Arnold had long since learned the policy of immediately complying with the thief-taker's orders, so he started off to fetch the brandy.

He returned with it in a few moments.

Jonathan drank of it deeply.

The influence of the stimulant soon made itself apparent.

But the strength which it produced was but of a factitious character.

Mr. Snoxall spoke again, and this time he was listened to.

"Mr. Wild, if you would only be guided by me."

"In what?"

"You are suffering from fearful wounds, or rather the weakness which those wounds have caused. The brandy you drink, although it may endow you with a momentary strength, will soon depart, and leave you weaker than before."

Jonathan felt the truth of all this, and the conviction also dawned upon him, that if he neglected his own health, he should be balked of his revenge and all his schemes of aggrandizement which he had formed.

This made him rather more temperate than usual, for he asked—

"What should you advise, Mr. Snoxall?"

"In the first place, rest."

The thief-taker felt how acceptable rest would be to his tried and debilitated frame.

"Rest not only of the body, but the mind," added the apothecary.

Jonathan grinned.

"Can you not give me a medicine that will have the same effect, and allow me action?"

Mr. Snoxall shook his head.

"Then give me brandy!" cried the thief-taker; "brandy, I say, and more of it. Brandy—brandy!"

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

RETURNS TO STEGGS AND EDGORTH BESS.

Had not Jonathan Wild's constitution been as strong as iron, it could never have withstood as it did the attacks which were made upon it.

The brandy mounted to his brain.

A mist of blood seemed to envelop all things.

But that soon passed away, and he again felt that he possessed a moiety at least of his ordinary strength.

For a pursuit after Jack Sheppard, to be of any avail, he knew it ought to be instituted at once, and he could trust the conduction of it into no other hands than his own.

Mr. Snoxall's proposal was one that he could not listen to at all.

Turning round, then, he gave orders to Quilt to get to-

gether as large a troop of men as he could, all mounted and armed, and he would place himself at their head and commence a vigorous pursuit of Jack Sheppard.

In the meanwhile he went over into Giltspur-street and made a good meal, which he washed down with plentiful potations of port wine, which he sent for from a contiguous public-house.

By the time he had done this, Quilt had managed to assemble a body of men somewhere about fifteen in number.

These were all in the pay of the thief-taker.

In pursuance of the agreement made between them, Quilt came over and told Wild, who was much the better for the food he had eaten and the wine he had drunk.

He mounted his horse, and no one to have seen him perform the act would have guessed his true condition.

The word of command was given to the troop, which immediately put itself in motion.

Jonathan led them up Giltspur-street and through Smithfield, into the open country.

But leaving the relation of what took place during his journey, and the success he met with to another chapter, we will go back a little, and turn our attention to a less repulsive character in our history.

We allude to Steggs.

When we saw him, and left him last, it was as a sentinel before the door of the room in which poor Edgworth Bess was imprisoned.

Jonathan Wild had uttered some tempting promises to him, and a struggle took place in his mind as to whether he should accept them or not.

Fortunately Steggs already knew Jonathan's treacherous nature. It had been displayed already.

Doubtless, had he been sincere in what he said, or if Steggs could have believed him to be sincere, the condition of Edgworth Bess and her two defenders, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, would have been sad indeed.

For a long time Steggs sat and pondered, unable to decide as to which way he should act.

He was dazzled by Wild's promises.

They were not unsubstantial ones either, for at that moment he could feel ten guineas in his pocket—the earnest—the first instalment of his future reward.

One thing only, perhaps, rose above his avarice, and that was his revenge.

Even this he would like to purchase as cheaply as possible.

Steggs recollected the injuries he had received at Wild's hands.

The desire for revenge increased.

He felt that it would be a greater satisfaction to witness the downfall of the thief-taker than it would be to witness his elevation.

"I will play into his hands," he said; "I cannot do wrong then. I will fall into his views, but it shall be warily! I shall soon find whether he intends to be false to me or not, and I shall know my course."

Having the means of entering the chamber in which Edgworth Bess was confined whenever he thought proper, he longed for an opportunity of communicating what he had learned from Blueskin, for he with common cunning wished to keep in with both parties, and then side with the one which seemed to offer him the greatest advantages.

But he dreaded to enter the room while Wild was in the house, or anywhere near at hand.

The thief-taker remained in his office the whole of the day; and it being Saturday night, he was engaged in totaling up his week's profits, when the clanging of the alarm bell of Newgate smote upon his ears.

He dropped his pen, and then rushed out.

Jonathan had left orders that Steggs was to be supplied with food at regular intervals, and it was soon after this event that the waiter from the eating-house in Giltspur-street came up with a meal on a tray.

This man was, of course, full of Jack's escape, the account of which Steggs received without astonishment.

In reply to his questions, however, the man told him that Wild had mounted a horse and set off in pursuit.

That he would be absent for some time, and that he should hear his return, Steggs felt certain.

Here, then, was the opportunity for which he had longed.

Accordingly, as soon as the waiter took his departure, he crossed the landing on tip-toe, and tapped at the door.

A faint "come in" followed, and inserting the skeleton-key in the lock, he turned it in the wards and entered.

The poor prisoner started up, and greeted him with a wan smile.

Steggs had a heart.

That smile touched it.

It is wonderful what an alteration a little thing will produce.

When he saw that smile, Steggs forgot Wild and all his glittering promises; he forgot his avarice, and the desire to render a service to the poor girl who looked up to him so confidently, and who believed him to be her friend, rose paramount to every other feeling.

"Tell me, tell me," she exclaimed, in a feeble voice, "tell me all you know at once. This suspense will kill me! Where is Jack?"

"He has escaped."

A cry of joy, which she could not have suppressed had her life depended upon it, came from her lips.

Steggs looked terrified.

He was afraid that some one would hear her, and held up his hand.

She saw it, and asked, in a suppressed voice—

"Is it—is it true? Can it really be true? Has he escaped?"

"Be silent, I beg," said Steggs, "for my sake—for your's—for Jack's!"

"Oh! yes, I will not cry out again, but I could not control myself before. Answer me! Oh! you cannot tell what I have suffered from suspense during all the weary time which has elapsed since I saw you last. Don't keep me in that suspense any longer, pray do not, but ease my heart. You told me that he was in Newgate!"

"I did, and so he was. He has been tried, and cast for death, but he has escaped. I have seen Blueskin."

"Have you? When?"

"Yesterday."

"Well?"

"He told me he had a plan arranged by which he hoped to be able to accomplish Jack's escape."

"He is a good friend."

"Since then I have not seen or heard anything of him, but I have just learned that the plan has been successful."

"Thank heaven!"

"Can you hear that bell tolling?"

The loud clanging of the alarm-bell could be heard quite plainly in the chamber.

"I do; I have heard it for some time. What does it mean?"

"It means that a prisoner has broken out of Newgate, and the prisoner that it tolls for is Jack Sheppard!"

Edgworth Bess clasped her hands together and listened. She thought she had never heard such sweet music as that dissonant bell, but soon another thought struck her, and she said—

"But has he got quite free? Do they pursue him?"

"No and yes."

"What do you mean by no and yes?"

"He has not got quite free, inasmuch as his foes are hard upon his track, and foremost among those in pursuit is Jonathan Wild."

"Oh! heavens, what am I to suffer from that man! He persecutes me and all who befriends me. I am afraid his malice will only be appeased by death."

"Do not be too much alarmed."

"There is danger."

"I admit that, but you must bear in mind that Jack has Blueskin with him, and that together they have more than once proved themselves a match for the thief-taker."

"True—true."

"If they are pursued, it does not follow that they will be captured."

"You give me new hopes."

"I desired to do so, and am glad I have succeeded. And now listen to me."

"I am listening, my friend."

"Strangely enough, Jonathan has selected me from among his other men to place confidence in, and has given me one particular duty to fulfil."

"What?"

"To remain outside this door as a sentinel, in order to see that no one enters this chamber who is not privileged to do so, and to see that you do not escape."

"Is it possible?"

"It sounds impossible, does it not? but we are all in the hands of fate. Jonathan has made offers and promises to me that would be enough to shake any man, provided I might be faithful to him; but the question is, would he be true to me?"

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

EDGORTH BESS WINS STEGGS OVER TO HER INTERESTS. STEGGS folded his arms together and bit his nails, as he propounded this important question.

Edgorth Bess raised her head, and looked him keenly in the face.

A vague idea of danger crossed her brain.

"He has not shook you?" she said, interrogatively, though her heart told her that he had. "You know him too well to believe in his sincerity. Jonathan Wild never yet kept faith with any human being, and never will."

"He did shake me," said Steggs. "But I am firm again now. I will be your faithful friend for ever."

"I hope so. You will find it more to your advantage in every way, for I shall never play you false. Has Jonathan offered you money to join him in his plans? If so, you shall have just double what he has promised, if you take my part and assist me in recovering my rights, for there is no witness so important as yourself."

"I confess, with shame, that I listened to his words, and that which he said made a deep impression on me; but that is over now—believe me, it is over, and I shall be faithful to you. I feel that I can trust you, and Jonathan has already shown too much treachery for me to believe in the sincerity of his promises."

"I am glad that you take that view of the case. He would not be faithful to his word. He has great schemes on hand—I know that well, and I have no doubt he would be able to carry them out more easily if he had an instrument which he could use; but rest assured, that, when the work was finished, and there was nothing more for it to do, it would be cast aside."

"That is it—that is it. But I will be even with him. I will fall in with his schemes. I will profess to help him, and so I will. I will assist him to reach the highest pinnacle to which he has aspired, and then when I have done that, when he feels that he has triumphed, I will cast him down from the giddy eminence, and so great will be his fall, that he will never rise again."

There was a wild excitement about Steggs as he thus spoke, and he uttered the words, which came easily to his lips, with a dramatic force which many an actor would have tried in vain to imitate.

"Dismiss that thought," said Bess. "Leave him to himself. The plan you propose is too dangerous—by far too dangerous, when you consider the nature of the man with whom you have to deal. Dismiss the thought, and devote yourself wholly to my interests. Believe me, that will prove your best plan of action, and the one that will bring you the greater profit."

"No, no, I have set my heart upon the scheme. Blueskin knows and has approved of it, and so would Jack if it was communicated to him. I am here to carry it out, and I will do it, or perish in the attempt. I shall not, however, neglect you. On the contrary, you shall be sheltered from all personal violence at his hands, and, if possible, be set at liberty. I was a fool to listen to what he said, but it was the money which blinded my judgment. But that is quite past. It will never occur again, and my original resolution shall be carried out."

Truly was Steggs an enemy much to be dreaded, and so the reader will find as the narrative proceeds.

Edgorth Bess shrunk back, terrified at the vehemence of his manner.

He saw the action, and controlled himself.

He spoke, after a moment's silence, in a much calmer and more rational tone of voice.

"Listen to me. While you are here you are, perhaps, as safe as you could be anywhere, especially in your feeble state of health. You must forget that you are in a prison, and feel assured that while I remain a sentinel

at your door, no harm can possibly come to you; neither at the hands of Wild himself, nor at the hands of any of his janizaries. I shall be all the time close at hand to protect you."

"Accept my thanks. They are all that I am able to offer you now, but I hope the time will soon be at hand when I shall be able to recognise your services in a more substantial manner."

"Enough. I am a poor man—a very poor man; and it is the want of money which has driven me to do that which I have done. But it is over."

"You shall have wealth, if that is what you crave. Oh! how I long to hear that Jack has escaped! If he has done so, then I should wish to be with him; and, if nothing better could be done, I would leave England with him, and in some other country live content, foregoing all my wealth."

"Don't speak of that."

"Why not?"

"I should be loath indeed to afford Jonathan Wild so great a triumph as that. Stay here, as I proposed."

"The place is hateful to me."

"No doubt—no doubt. But, then, you should consider your weak state. You would be unequal to much exertion."

"I am very ill."

"You are. I wonder you are still in life. And now listen to me. With respect to yourself, Jonathan's plans are as clear as noonday."

"To you they may be, but they are not so to me. If you can, explain them to me."

"Willingly, because then you will see that, for the present, you are safe; and that you have nothing much to fear from the thief-taker, if you do not exasperate him."

"Tell me, then, at once."

"You are not yet of age?"

"I know it."

"What is your age? Everything depends upon that."

"I must be nearly twenty."

"Then you have one year of safety. When you are twenty-one you will be mistress of and responsible for your own actions. Do you understand?"

"Yes—yes."

"Until then you are not your own mistress, nor would the law hold you accountable for your actions. Now, can you guess what Jonathan will do?"

"No."

"He will keep you here a prisoner, and take every care of you until you are of age."

"Yes—yes."

"And then he will find some means, I do not say what, of forcing you into a marriage with him."

"Mercy!"

"Do you understand now?"

"I do—I do, indeed. I have heard something of this before."

"He will then be your husband and your master. Immediately after this he will take steps to recover your wealth and title, and when he has succeeded in this, he will step forward, and, as your husband, lay claim to it all."

"The monstrous villain!"

"He deserves the title. You can see now his policy. But he shall be thwarted. Fear nothing. Do not be cast down. Until the time I mention, you are perfectly safe. Let me advise you, then, to keep yourself calm, and get well as soon as possible. I will watch over you, and, as early as I can, will communicate with Jack and Blueskin, who shall decide what had best be done. Does this content you?"

"It does—but" —

"But what?"

"Fain would I leave this place at once."

"You may well wish it, but you are safest here. While you are a prisoner, Jonathan will attempt nothing, so do not precipitate matters, or hurry him into doing what he would not."

"I will try."

"Above all, keep a good heart. You see, Jack Sheppard has escaped; and now I will tell you something more, which ought to make you happy."

"What—what?"

"When you are in full possession of your rights, you will have the command of almost unbounded wealth, for

though your uncle has lived freely, yet all is so strictly intailed, that he can make away with nothing. Wealth is power. You will have great—very great influence. Your intercession would go a long way towards obtaining a pardon for”——

“Jack Sheppard,” interrupted Bess, eagerly.

“Yes, Jack Sheppard, or any one else in whom you might feel an interest.”

“That does indeed give me hopes. I will be guided by what you say in every particular. Come to me as often as you can, for your words are the only consolation I receive. Try to see Blueskin as early as you can, and hear what he says.”

“He will be able to judge best,” said Steggs, “and when he is prepared, we shall see what can be done towards escaping, but let it be how it will, it is necessary for you to be in good health and strength.”

“I will try—I will try. I feel better and stronger now than I have done since I have been in this dreary place. When shall you see Blueskin?”

“That is more than I can tell. Both him and Jack are pursued by Jonathan Wild, and there is no knowing how far he will chase them, or how the pursuit will terminate. Hark! what is that?”

A confused noise came from below.

“I must leave you now,” said Steggs, “it will be unsafe for me to stay any longer. I must see what has happened. Perhaps Jonathan has returned.”

“You will see me again as soon as you can?”

“I promise you I will, and now good night.”

“Good night.”

Steggs locked the door, and peered over the balusters. Something of an unusual character was taking place below.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

THE HORSE FALLS DEAD UPON THE ROAD, LEAVING JACK SHEPPARD AND HIS COMRADES IN AN AWKWARD SITUATION.

WHEN Jack fired the pistol and shot Wild in the head, he did not stop to see what injury his old foe had received.

On the contrary, Johnson whipped the horse, and made him go at a still greater speed.

The poor creature was almost exhausted, but it had a capital spirit, and struggled onward.

Blueskin and Jack saw Jonathan fall off his horse on to the roadway, but in another moment he was out of sight in the darkness.

The former made his way to the front of the cart.

“Off with your woman’s toggery, Joe,” he said, “you will find it inconvenient if the time for action comes. I will take the reins a bit.”

Johnson said not a word in reply, but handed him the reins.

He then, without any difficulty, slipped off the female apparel with which he had disguised himself, and which he had put on over his ordinary clothing.

He rolled it up in a bundle, and threw it out of the cart.

“Now, which way shall we take, Joe?” asked Blueskin. “I did not think the pursuit after us would be so hot, and I am quite out of my latitude.”

“I have been wondering which would be the best way to take,” replied Johnson. “We are out of the hearing of our pursuers. Suppose we were to take the first turning to the left, and make our way across the country in a westerly direction?”

“Agreed, that will do as well as anything. You had better take the reins again.”

Johnson did so.

“I am afraid the nag won’t carry us much further. She seems all but done for now.”

“Take it easy when you get round the corner. Ten to one if we do not throw them entirely off the scent.”

“I hope we shall be lucky enough to do so. That was an awful downer Jonathan had. I heard the crash myself.”

“It was, and it will be a good thing if it puts a stop to the pursuit altogether.”

“I am afraid there will be small chance of that. This escape, and the daring manner in which it was effected,

will make a tremendous uproar. What do you think, Jack?”

“I think so. But tell me, where is Edgworth Bess?”

“A prisoner.”

“In Wild’s house?”

“Yes.”

“Heaven help her, then!”

“Heaven will help her.”

“Do not take me far from London. Do you hear? I shall not rest a moment until I have set her free, and placed her somewhere in safety.”

“We will talk of that directly. She is in no immediate danger. Do you remember Steggs?”

“The accomplice of Lord Denmild?”

“Yes, that is the man.”

“What of him?”

“Jonathan Wild’s treachery has made him our friend, and he is now as anxious to serve Edgworth Bess as he was before to persecute her.”

“Is he sincere?”

“I think so.”

“Why?”

Blueskin then proceeded to relate what had taken place, and put him in possession of all facts.

But Jack was far from satisfied.

He doubted Steggs.

And while the poor heiress was in Wild’s house he dreaded the worst.

Besides she was ill, suffering, and he determined to see her.

He had heard with joy that she had refused to believe him guilty of the crime for which he was condemned to death.

He would know no rest until he had seen her.

He was, in truth, weary and tired of life, and would willingly have laid down there and then and died, had it not been for her.

She it was who formed the tie which bound him to existence, and that tie was too strong to be easily broken.

But he felt that he should be quite content to surrender up himself, if he could only see her in safety and in possession of those rights and honours of which she had so long been deprived.

“I shall yet triumph over the villain Wild!” he exclaimed, with emphasis. “He has tried hard to bring me to the scaffold, but all his efforts have been abortive ones. Now I will try what I can do. He shall suffer the death he has been so anxious to inflict upon me, and then I shall feel content.”

“Here is my hand in that matter,” replied Blueskin; “I will join you in it, and assist you heart and soul. We are not very well circumstanced to carry out our intention, but much can be done when you are determined. Jonathan Wild shall swing at Tyburn before he is much older.”

“And a good job too,” chimed in Johnson; “and”——

He paused abruptly.

The horse had continued going at good speed, and was now in a kind of half gallop, when he suddenly fell to the ground as if struck down by lightning.

The shafts of the cart snapped asunder in a moment, and the three friends, wholly unprepared for the event, were pitched out violently into the roadway.

The horse was dead.

He had gone as long as his muscles would sustain him; they had been stretched to their utmost tension, and he had given way all at once.

When he fell he never moved in the least.

Blueskin and Johnson were in the front of the cart, and were pitched out in a moment, while Jack was thrown out over the side.

All alighted on the hard road with considerable force. Fortunately, however, neither were much hurt, and after a minute or two, during which they recovered their senses a little, all three scrambled to their feet.

They were much bruised and shaken, of course, but they struggled against the sensation which the pain caused, for they knew not how soon their foes might be upon them.

To be sure they had not heard much of them for the last few moments, but they might be upon their track for all that.

A glance showed them that the horse was dead, and quite incapable of motion.

What would be the best thing to do?

If they left the cart just where it was, in the middle of the road, it would give a clue to their whereabouts.

But what was to be done with them?

Blueskin went a little way down the road, and then came to a gate leading into a meadow.

It was locked, but that was not much of an obstacle to Blueskin.

He had it open in a trice.

Then, going back, he told his comrades what he had done, and they set about disentangling the cart from the horse.

When this was done, the three easily drew the cart along, for it was of a light build, and concealed it in the meadows behind the hedge.

Then there was the horse to dispose of.

This was by far a more troublesome affair, but by their united strength they succeeded in dragging it after them, a few yards at a time, until that was in the meadow likewise.

Blueskin pulled the gate shut, and finding it had a tendency to swing open, he kept it in its proper place by means of a large stone which he rolled against it.

There were now no very perceptible traces of what had happened, but their position was much worse than it had been.

Altogether a good deal of time had been occupied, and they every moment expected to hear the trampling hoofs of their pursuers' horses on the road.

But they were not audible as yet.

"What shall we do, Johnson?" Blueskin asked.

"We cannot do better than keep straight down the road. There is a preserve not much further on, and if we are hard pressed we can take refuge in it."

This was agreed to.

They started at first to go down the road at a trot, but the pain of the bruises they had received soon caused them to diminish their speed.

They went at a walk, and even that was laborious and distressing.

And now, to add to their discomfiture, they could hear quite plainly that which they had so long expected—namely, the trampling of horses' feet.

"Where is the preserve you spoke of? The sooner we enter it the better, for I cannot keep up much longer, and the horsemen behind will be upon us directly."

It was Jack Sheppard who spoke.

He had said nothing before, but he had been hurt much more than either of the others, for the simple reason that he had fallen from a greater height and in a more awkward manner.

"It is not many yards further," responded Johnson. "Keep up, and we shall be all right. Do you see that black-looking mass before you, which seems almost like a cloud?"

"Yes—yes."

"That is it, then. Cheer up. My own bones ache so that I can scarcely move. Keep up."

Nothing more was said, except that now and then one or other of them would utter a dismal groan which the anguish motion caused brought forth.

At length the plantation was reached.

But they found that it was guarded from the road by a high wooden fence behind, and close to which grew some dense vegetation.

All were deeply disappointed and ready to give in, except Johnson, who said—

"Keep to the left. Leave the road. Before long you will come to a gap, through which you will be able to force your way. On with you at once. There is no time to lose!"

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

JACK SHEPPARD, BLUESKIN, AND JOHNSON HAVE AN ADVENTURE IN THE PLANTATION.

THERE was, indeed, no time to lose, for the horsemen gained upon them with great rapidity.

It was practicable to skirt the plantation on its eastern side—the northern faced the road—and accordingly our friends, under the direction of Johnson, did so.

It was over a meadow that they took their way.

Ere long the palings began to present a dilapidated appearance, and they pushed on with renewed hope of quickly reaching the inclosure.

On came the horsemen at a furious pace. They did not halt at any place, so it would seem they had not noticed the fall of the horse.

All held their breaths.

There was a slight chance that they would sweep down the road, and come to the conclusion that the fugitives were not there, and this chance was fulfilled, or the first portion of it, at any rate.

They passed by the plantation with undiminished speed.

"Take cheer from that," said Johnson, "for that is a very great piece of luck. I don't say they won't come back, because they may have known for certain that we came down here. We must run the risk of that. We shall find a place where we can scramble through directly."

"What do you say to making one?" asked Blueskin. "The wood is extremely rotten, and I could pull some of it down in a moment."

"No—no. You had better not do that. The keepers may see it, and besides, it will serve to show the way we have taken. Push on a little further, and we shall find a place ready made."

Blueskin was convinced that his friend was right, so he continued his course along the palings without another word.

About two hundred paces further on, they came to a place where the fence had been completely demolished.

"This is it," said Johnson. "You can get in easily enough."

And so they could.

Just, however, as they were about to plunge among the trees, they were all startled by the loud report of a gun.

It was somewhere close at hand.

"What does that mean?" asked Jack.

"Either the poachers or the keepers are about. Confound them! Ten to one if the sound of the report does not reach the ears of the horsemen who have just passed, and cause them to return. Curse them! There they go again!"

Another report followed.

Something of an unusual nature was taking place, for a certainty, though the supposition which Johnson had uttered was a probable enough one.

By general consent he had taken the command of the whole party, and he now led them on through the intricacies of the wood.

They proceeded for some time in silence.

No more shots followed.

It was Johnson's intention to go as near to the centre of the plantation as possible, believing that he then had the best chance of eluding his foes.

Not a word was spoken, and they were careful to make no more noise in their progress than they could possibly avoid, for they knew not what unfriendly ears might be close by, but in spite of all their care they could not prevent a slight crackling now and then, as a twig or dead branch of a tree snapped under their feet.

All at once Johnson came to a halt.

His companions stopped likewise, and as they did so they heard a faint moaning sound.

They all listened intently to it.

What or who it came from they could not tell.

They had taken care when they heard the shot fired to notice the spot from which they appeared to come, and had taken a path that would lead them directly from it.

Johnson touched Blueskin on the arm.

"You are younger than I am. Creep forward stealthily a little way and then return, and try if you can find out what that means. We will stay where we are. It may be of importance to us to know, and I know Jack is too much hurt, or I should have asked him."

This was uttered rapidly and in a low tone of voice.

Blueskin replied by at once doing as he was requested.

It was an anxious five minutes which elapsed between the time of his departure and his return.

Neither Sheppard nor Johnson uttered a word, but bent all their faculties to the one of listening.

At length they heard a rustling noise, and directly afterwards, Blueskin appeared.

"What is it?" they both asked in a breath.

"Nothing to be over alarmed about, I think. Follow me quickly and quietly."

As he spoke, Blueskin glided away, and they had no resource but to follow him, and discover what was the cause of the strange sound they had heard.

After proceeding about a hundred paces through a thicket which kept increasing in density every moment, they came to a small clearing, where the trees and undergrowth had either been removed or had never grown.

In this place was a rudely-built wood hut.

Its roof was shrouded by tall trees, whose branches projected far over it, and cast it into deep shadow.

There was sufficient light for all three of our friends to note the appearance of this place with tolerable accuracy.

Blueskin had halted at the edge of this clearing, and the other two, who were following, did the same.

The former then pointed to the hut.

Following the direction of his finger, Jack and Johnson perceived near the door of the hut, and lying apparently across its threshold, the body of a man.

At least, they took it to be such, although the outlines of it were only partially defined.

Even as they gazed, there arose the same cry as they had before heard.

The connexion between this man and the shots they had heard not long before was too close to be overlooked, and they at once came to the conclusion that he was wounded.

But by whom?

That was a question none of them could answer.

Jack was young, and had, in some respects, a sensitive nature.

In the present instance, situated as they were, cold prudence would have recommended them to leave that spot as fast as possible, and leave the wounded man to take his fate, lest his foes should come upon him, and be the means of discovering them also.

But the humanity of Jack's nature would not suffer him to listen to this selfish plea. He determined to succour the wounded man at all hazards, let him be whom he may.

He touched Blueskin, therefore, on the arm to attract his attention, for he stood near enough to him to be able to do so, and said—

"You will help him, Blue, shall you not? He is hurt."

"I should like to give him some assistance, poor fellow, but we are scarcely in a position to do so."

"We are not, and yet I don't see how we could make matters worse."

"Nor I."

"Besides, if either of us were in his place, we should think it very hard to be passed by and not noticed."

"True."

"He may be too much hurt for our assistance to avail him. At any rate, we can but step forward and see, and leave him to his fate afterwards."

"Agreed."

"Stop a moment," said Johnson, "there may be more danger in this than meets the eye. Recollect, we are in very great peril. Suppose, now, this should only be some scheme to capture us?"

"Pho—pho!"

"You do not think it is?"

"I do not."

"Go on, then, by all means. I should be as sorry to leave him without ascertaining his condition as yourselves."

This point having thus been settled, all three cautiously crossed the open space.

The diameter of it in its widest part was only a few yards, so that they quickly reached the prostrate form.

Steeping down, Blueskin saw, that as they had first surmised, it was the body of a man.

The moan of anguish which came from his lips as soon as Blueskin touched him, showed that he retained full possession of his consciousness.

"Help! help!" he gasped. "I am shot. Help! help! I have come thus far. Oh! they have done for me at last. Help! help! or I die! Hark! hark! they are on my track—the track of blood! I hear the cracking of the bushes as they force their way. They come—they come!"

This speech was uttered with strange volubility, but in such a low tone of voice, that had not Blueskin been bending over him with his ear only about a couple of inches from his mouth, he could not have told what he said.

There was not much to be gathered from his words—part of them were but raving—for Blueskin's ears were quick, and he could not detect the sounds to which he had alluded.

He continued speaking, but this time with more calmness and coherence.

"Save me, and help me! Save me, and help me! Carry me into the hut—my hut. I am not much hurt. It is strong. Carry me in, and if I am to die, let me die there."

Blueskin glanced upwards.

The building was certainly strong.

The door was open.

"He wants to be carried in," he said to his comrades.

"Do so, then."

"He says he is not much hurt."

"The place will serve us, perhaps, for a hiding-place," suggested Jack, "at any rate, we can rest ourselves. I do not feel as though I could go much further."

CHAPTER CXC.

BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, JOHNSON, AND THE WOUNDED MAN ARE ATTACKED IN THE HUT BY THE OFFICERS OF POLICE.

"HELP me," then exclaimed Blueskin, "and we will carry him in and see what the inside of the place is like."

"Very good," said Johnson, and between the two the wounded man was carried into the hut.

Jack came last, and he closed the door.

A pungent smoke, as though coming from some wood fire, saluted their nostrils, and in a moment after they saw a faint glow at a little distance.

This was the fire, and Jack crept towards it.

The interior of the hut was profoundly dark, and he took his course with great caution, for he did not know what obstacles lay in his road.

At length, however, the fire was reached.

He kicked the embers with his foot, and a faint sputtering flame started up, which illumined the place with a momentary radiance.

Jack was pleased to find that there were several half-burned logs of wood upon the fire, and by knocking these about he soon succeeded in making the fire burn up well, and give a bright and steady light.

By its aid the wounded man was looked at, having been brought close to the fire for that purpose.

He was now insensible.

His apparel was soaked in blood.

He was dressed like an ordinary farm-servant.

Rapidly and skilfully Blueskin undid his clothing, in order to find the wound and ascertain its nature; but before he could do so, his quick ears caught a faint sound outside.

He sprang to his feet in a moment.

His companions had heard the same sound, and a look of alarm appeared upon their countenances.

The sound became more unequivocal.

It was the trampling of feet, mingled with the murmur of voices.

To rush to the door was an instinctive impulse which all three obeyed.

They opened it a little way, and peeped out.

A loud cry followed, and then there dashed into the clearing about a dozen men.

They were all dressed as keepers.

The truth now flashed upon the minds of all three.

The man who had been wounded was a poacher.

He had doubtless left a track of blood all the way he came, and so they were easily able to follow him.

Truly were our friends now in a most awkward predicament.

Blueskin, however, remembered what the man had said about the hut being strong, and so he closed the door in a moment, and looked for the fastenings.

There was a very large wooden bar, fixed by a pivot to the centre of the door.

One swing round, and it fitted securely in its staples.

A large bolt was at the top and bottom, and these he drew.

"He is in the hut," cried a voice. "Down with the door!"



[JACK SHEPPARD BUYS AN ACCOUNT OF HIS ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.]

The object mentioned was immediately struck a violent blow with some heavy instrument, which made it shake in its setting.

But the door was left by our friends, and a hasty examination made of the rest of the building, which consisted of but one apartment, and without any apertures whatever to serve as windows.

This, as it happened, was a fortunate thing.

They looked rather blankly at each other, however, as they propounded the question—

What are we to do?

The blows upon the door were incessant, and it seemed that, despite its strength, it would ere long give way.

Our three friends were well armed and amply provided with ammunition, so that, provided the place stood, they would be able to maintain a siege for a considerable time.

"We must fight it out, I suppose," said Blueskin. "I do not see what other course is open to us."

As he spoke he, with the greatest calmness apparently, took a brace of pistols from his pockets and loaded them.

In this he was followed by the other two.

"Surrender," cried a voice at the door. "Surrender, or you die."

No notice whatever was taken of this speech, and the attack was renewed upon the door with fresh vigour.

When the pistols were loaded, Blueskin took one of the brands from the fire and held it above his head like a torch.

The wood of which it was composed was of some resinous quality, and it sent out a bright sputtering flame.

By the aid of this he made a fresh and more accurate examination of the interior of the hut.

He was in hopes of being able to find some other means of exit of which they could avail themselves.

But he could find nothing of the sort. Indeed, there was but one means by which the hut could be entered or left, and through which light was admitted, and that was the door which the keepers were so intent upon battering down.

When Blueskin had quite assured himself of this, he cast down the firebrand, and said, seriously—

"Jack, my friend, and you, Johnson. We have got ourselves into a pretty fix. We have run in here like rats into a trap, and I am afraid here we shall be comfortably caught."

"Not without giving them some trouble first," said Jack. "We are at bay, and now we will fight it out with them to the death. For one, I am determined not to surrender with life."

"Bravo, Jack. Now for it."

A tremendous blow was at this moment given to the door; but though it had been so long and so continually assaulted, it gave no more signs of giving way than at first—namely, that it shook in its frame.

One great cause of this, setting aside the strength of the door, was, that the keepers had no proper instruments for knocking it down.

In fact, the only ones they had at all available were the butts of their guns, and these showed more symptoms of giving way than the door itself.

They desisted, therefore, and one of them again cried—

"Open the door, in the king's name! Surrender! or we fire upon you."

Then finding all within the hut as silent as before, and that no notice was taken of this appeal, the speaker continued,—

"Make ready—present!"

He paused, in order to give those within time to surrender, ere he pronounced the last word.

All was still.

"Fire!"

The sharp report of three guns, almost at the same moment, arose with a startling distinctness upon the air.

The three bullets with which the weapons were loaded went crashing through the woodwork.

The door was thick, but the lead found a way through it, and was flattened against the opposite wall.

It had been an easy enough matter for our three friends to get out of all possible range of the bullets, and neither of them had received the least injury.

But they saw by this how energetic the men were.

"Shall we return the fire, Blue?" asked Jack.

"Not yet. We are not in a position to do them any harm. Let them go at it. If they fire at the door, we can easily get out of the way of the bullets."

The men outside seemed rather annoyed to find that their fire was unheeded, for they re-loaded rapidly, and fired again.

But this was folly, and they soon found that some other means of dislodging those within the hut must be devised, ere they could hope to meet with success.

A cessation of hostilities now took place, during which they consulted together as to what was to be done.

They were only three in number, and did not care to send one away to procure additional assistance.

As for those within the hut, they scarcely knew what to think of the protracted stillness—whether it boded them danger or safety.

It was Jack who hit upon the thought of questioning the man, through rendering assistance to whom, they had got into this great peril.

"Who knows?" he said. "We may learn something important from him respecting the character of the men who are outside? He can tell us not only who they are, but why they pursue him."

"True! We ought to have thought of that before."

"There is plenty of time yet," said Johnson. "Let us see. I am afraid he is past speech."

All three had made their way to the centre of the hut, where the fire was burning on the hearth, and close to which the wounded man lay.

He was quite still.

Johnson knocked the fire together, and the light fell upon his face.

One glance was sufficient to show that he was either insensible or dead.

The ghastly pallor of his face made all think the latter, and Johnson said—

"I am afraid he is a gone mutton. However, if there is any life in his body this will rouse it."

He took a flask from his pocket as he spoke.

"There is a drop of pure unwatered brandy in that," he said. "I thought perhaps it would come in useful. I

mostly carry some in my pocket. Blue, hold his head up a little way."

Blueskin held the man in a half-sitting posture, and Johnson poured a considerable quantity of brandy down his throat.

That the spirit was strong, the convulsive gasps which the man gave testified.

His face assumed quite a blue tinge, and he seemed in imminent danger of choking.

Indeed, the brandy must either have had the effect of extinguishing his life at once, or recovering him.

The chances were about equal.

Suddenly, however, Blueskin let go his hold, and the man's head fell with a dab on to the hearthstone, while at the same moment he uttered an ejaculation of alarm.

CHAPTER CXCI.

IN WHICH THE ATTACK OF THE OFFICERS UPON THE HUT IS CONTINUED.

THE alarm which Blueskin displayed was fully shared in by his two companions.

Johnson dropped the flask, and its precious contents were wasted on the floor.

Jack Sheppard started to his feet.

All three assumed listening attitudes.

The sound which had so alarmed them was the tramp of many footsteps, and then a voice had called out, in true military fashion—

"Halt!"

This was the cause of the effects we have described.

Danger now was imminent in the extreme.

"The police have found us," said Blueskin, in a whisper.

"I am afraid so."

"It is all over with us, then."

Blueskin was quite right.

The party of officers, after going for some distance down the lane without finding any signs of those whom they were in search, came to the conclusion that somehow or other they had passed them.

With this conviction they had turned back.

Their horses were much fatigued, and so as there was no pressing need to make much speed, they went at a gentle trot, looking carefully around them in every direction as they did so, in the hope of finding some trace of the prisoners.

It would have been their wisest policy to have done this at first.

On their return, they came of course to the plantation, and the idea that this would form a capital place of concealment occurred to all of them.

They were debating the matter when the report of the volley which the keepers fired at the door of the hut reached their ears.

To be sure, this might have nothing to do with the business they were upon, but then again it might, so, by the orders of their chief, all alighted, and the horses having been left in charge of two of their number, the remainder plunged into the wood and made their way as nearly as they could in the direction from which the sound had come.

The second volley, following so close upon the other as it did, served materially to assist them, and they pushed onwards regardless of all obstacles.

A very little while brought them to the clearing.

As soon as their leader saw they had reached their destination, he had cried out halt, and the whole troop, numbering hard upon twenty men, came to a standstill in front of the hut.

His next step was to speak to the three keepers.

"What is all this?" he asked. "Are there any persons concealed in that hut?"

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"We don't know."

"We are in pursuit of the notorious Jack Sheppard, who has just managed to effect another escape from Newgate, and two persons by whom he was assisted. Are they in the hut?"

"That's more than we can tell, sir. As you can doubtless tell by our dresses, we are keepers, and have hunted a poacher through the wood."

"A poacher!" exclaimed the chief of the police. "Is that all?"

"I don't know. We tracked him as far as the hut by his blood, which has dropped all about. But he must have been succored by some one."

"How can you tell?"

"Not only have we heard voices within the hut, but many footprints could be seen about the door of it. We have called to them to surrender, and fired upon them, but they have taken no heed."

"We are on the right scent, I'll be bound," said the chief officer. Birds of a feather always flock together, and if we do not find the three in here it is very odd to me. At any rate, we can but try, and we shall be sure of a capital reward if we find the birds we want."

"Then you will assist us?" said one of the keepers.

"We will."

"We were deliberating when you came up what measures we should take to oust them, but were unable to think of anything likely."

"We'll see to that," said the chief officer, in an energetic voice. "Now, my lads, be lively. Place yourselves in a chain round the hut, and see that no one leaves it. We'll soon have them out, I'll be bound."

The officer thought it a piece of good generalship to give these orders in as loud a tone of voice as he possibly could, in order that what he said should reach the ears of those within, and have due weight upon them.

Indeed, with many men less courageous than our friends, this was a very likely means of obtaining a surrender, but with them the attempt utterly and completely failed.

But as they listened they could hear the officers form a circle round the hut, in obedience to the orders they had received.

There was, however, despite their bravery, an uncomfortable feeling about the hearts of all.

They looked upon their ultimate capture as inevitable and certain.

So many men would make short work of demolishing the hut altogether.

Jack was full of despair.

He thought that to be captured and taken back to Newgate would be so bitter, that death was a thousand times more preferable.

Was he doomed never again to see Edgworth Bess on earth? Had he seen that fair and persecuted girl for the last time?

Truly there now seemed little chance of his seeing her. Two alternatives stared him in the face.

Capture.

Death.

For the first he felt that, should he once more fall into the hands of the myrmidons of the law, such precautions would be taken as to make it a matter of total impossibility for him to escape.

Then with respect to the latter, though not accustomed to speculate deeply upon such matters, Jack thought that if what he had heard respecting heaven and hell was true, there could be no hope then, for that the same place would receive both he could not bring himself to believe.

But the natural bravery of his disposition soon rose above this feeling.

Blueskin and Johnson looked calm and determined.

They each held in their hands a pair of loaded pistols ready for immediate service.

The disposition of the officers round the hut was soon made, and they found themselves almost able to touch one another.

The chief having seen this done, again called to those within to surrender.

But it was all to no purpose, he might just as well have addressed himself to the wooden walls of the hut.

And now a disagreeable idea occurred to the chief officer, and that was that his prey had, in some manner or other, managed to make their escape before the investment of the building by his men.

Acting under this idea, he summoned two to his side, and said,—

"Draw your cutlasses, my lads, and attack that door. You will soon have it down, I'll warrant."

Nothing loth, the officers drew their cutlasses, and began striking the door with them.

Chips flew at every blow.

It was quite clear that a little patience would enable them to effect an entrance, and perhaps more expeditiously than in any other way.

Our friends soon found out what their enemies were about, and Blueskin said,—

"We must put a stop to this somehow or another. We have plenty of ammunition. Let all three of us go to the door and fire through it simultaneously, and then drop flat to the ground before they have time to return the discharge."

"Agreed; it will hinder their operations a little, and allow us time to think, if it does no other good."

"That is a great good. Come on!"

The three then stealthily crept to the door, which was of uncommon thickness, and composed of solid oak; so that the police had not yet succeeded in making a breach through it.

Blueskin gave the word to fire in a whisper, and it was immediately followed by the report of the six pistols, which raised such a report as to be absolutely deafening.

A loud yell of pain from those without mingled with it, which pretty plainly showed that they had done some execution among their enemies.

In anticipation that their fire would be responded to, Blueskin had commanded them to drop to the floor, where they would be almost sure not to meet with any injury.

Accordingly they did so, and the policy of the movement soon became apparent.

Directly they recovered from the consternation which this vigorous assault produced, all those near the door who had firearms discharged them at it.

But none were aimed low enough down to reach our friends as they lay on the floor.

"Load again," whispered Blueskin; "but don't move."

Scarcely had he uttered these words than another volley was fired, and then the attack upon the door was recommenced.

For a little while Blueskin suffered them to go on unmolested.

Then rising as before, and his comrades with him, they stood at the requisite distance from the door, and pulled their triggers.

The six reports followed, echoed, as upon the previous occasion, by the yells and groans of those who were hit.

The attack upon the door ceased.

"If we can keep that up, Jack, I think we shall take some of the courage out of them."

"Yes; but what is to become of us when we reach the end of our ammunition?"

"What, indeed! but don't let us anticipate evil. We have done better, so far, than I could have expected."

Jack shook his head, and so did Johnson.

Neither felt so very well satisfied, nor did Blueskin in his heart, only he desired to keep up his comrades' spirits as well as possible.

The officers seemed to have retired to deliberate, for a deep silence, except that the murmuring of voices could now and then be heard, ensued.

Some new plan of tactics would have to be adopted, that was clear, for if the inmates kept up as vigorous a resistance as they had begun, their numbers would be fearfully reduced before the door could be broken down.

The men lunged back, too, a great deal.

The chief himself was wounded, and the others by no means cared about exposing their bodies to so terrible and deadly a fire.

Hence, a temporary lull in the proceedings took place, while they considered what had better be done.

CHAPTER CXII.

THE OFFICERS OF POLICE AT LAST SUCCEEDED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE HUT THROUGH THE ROOF.

THAT four men, and one of them seriously wounded, should be able for any length of time to hold out against such overwhelming numbers, was absurd.

In the end their capture must take place, and the officers, while they maintained their circle round the hut, felt that it was utterly impossible for any one within the building to leave it unperceived.

Still the amount of trouble and loss they had already experienced, without having gained the slightest advantage, was annoying in the extreme.

The door seemed the weakest point at which the attack

could be made. The walls were composed of solid blocks or wood of great thickness, and very securely clamped together, so there was no hope of breaking through them.

There was, however, one weak point of the defences which was entirely overlooked and never thought of.

How this was is hard to say, but the fact remains the same, notwithstanding.

The weak part in the hut was what is generally the weakest part in all buildings, and that is the roof.

In some buildings, however, the roof is quite inaccessible, but this was not the case with the hut.

It was not nine feet above the ground at the most in its lowest part.

It was composed of thatch, but not thatch simply.

Underneath the thin covering of straw was a series of wooden poles laid as closely together as their shape would admit.

These were firmly secured to other pieces of wood lying at right angles to them, the ends of which were fastened to the walls and to the beam at the top.

It was the chief of police, who was really a bold brave man, who first thought of endeavouring to make a breach through the roof.

The wound he had received made him physically incompetent to have headed the attempt as he would have wished, so he was forced to content himself with issuing orders merely.

"Kenrick," he said, addressing one of the men who next to him had the control of the others, "Kenrick!"

"Yes, sir."

"Get the men together, and attack the roof."

"Very good, sir."

"Leave the door to itself now. Make no more noise than you can possibly help, or you may be picked off in the same way as before. Ah! curses!"

The chief of police's wound gave him rather a sudden twinge as he spoke.

Kenrick moved off, and gave the order to the men, who set about obeying it with more alacrity than they had recently displayed.

The roof was reached with very little trouble, and then they commenced stripping off the thatch.

This was done easily enough.

Doubtless, they anticipated that when they had done this their work was over, but they soon found their mistake when the longitudinal beams of wood were brought to view.

They had their cutlasses drawn, however, and commenced hacking them away.

Those within seemed determined not to surrender until they had done all the mischief they possibly could, for though they saw that capture was so imminent, they fired another volley at the men on the roof.

Its efficacy was at once attested, too, by the cries which followed, and then a rumbling noise succeeded, caused by those who had been killed or wounded rolling down the roof on to the ground.

The numbers of the men were now seriously reduced, but their blood seemed to get heated by the slaughter they saw around them, and they returned to the attack with greater energy than ever.

The position of those within the hut was an excellent one, for while they were able to do so much damage, they were themselves free from all consequences of it.

They could tell exactly where the besiegers were, and take a deadly aim accordingly, but the besiegers could not so well ascertain their precise situation, though very many shots had been fired into the hut, and both Blueskin and Johnson had been slightly wounded by them.

And now one of the police-officers, by an exertion of great strength, caught hold of one of the poles we have mentioned, and wrenched it from its place.

Assistance was rendered him as soon as the others saw what he was about, and a breach in the roof was fairly and really made.

For the first time the officers could see into the interior of the hut.

But beyond a patch of darkness, they could make out nothing.

Our three friends had been tolerably well supplied with ammunition, but as they had fired a great many volleys, and as each volley consisted of six shots, they soon reduced their supply to a very small amount.

But when they saw the opening made in the roof they prepared to fire, but waited until the heads of several of their foes appeared at the orifice.

"They then drew their triggers.

The police had done precisely as they had, and fired at the same moment. To be sure, there aim was not so accurate, but the bullets scattered about in rather an alarming manner.

But owing to the confined space in which their heads appeared, the three friends had done a terrible amount of execution.

The officers were again repulsed, and the whole of them who were on the roof either rolled or tumbled to the ground.

They were now in a state of the greatest exasperation, and acted more like madmen than human beings.

They could never have believed it lay in the power of three persons intrenched in a hut to do them so much damage.

But they found it out to their cost, as we have seen.

The chief of the police uttered some awful curses when he saw his men again repulsed.

Kenrick had been shot, and the officers were now without a leader.

"Fire the hut!" cried the chief, in a perfect rage. "Set fire to it. Smoke them out. That is the only way. We shall be sure to have them."

"Hurrah!" responded the others then, who all burned for personal vengeance. "Hurrah! that will do it."

Half-a-dozen rushed off for brushwood, plenty of which grew close at hand, and having gathered a large quantity, they piled it up against the door in a huge heap.

Some phosphorous matches were then produced, and several having been lighted were held to the wood.

The bottom part of the combustible heap was formed of dry leaves and twigs of trees, which caught fire in a moment, and blazed up brightly.

The flames soon communicated themselves to the upper portion.

Dense volumes of smoke arose, and the fire crackled loudly.

The police-officers surrounded the hut, and kept as close to the flames as they could, while they watched their progress with unfeigned satisfaction.

The inflammable materials had been piled against the door of the hut with considerable art, although it was done so hastily.

They were arranged so that the main body of the flames played upon it.

An ominous silence followed the last attempt to carry the hut by storm.

No sound whatever could be heard to come from the inmates of it, who had defended themselves with so much bravery and desperation.

They thought when so terrible an alternative was offered them as to be burned out by fire, that they would then and there have cried out for mercy, and surrendered.

But Blueskin was not exactly the sort of man to do that, let the peril with which he was menaced be what it might.

② Rather than give in, he would fight to the last gasp.

The fire still burned.

Its violence increased, and the long, red flames that shot upward seized upon everything within their reach and devoured it.

They caught the thatched roof, and soon the whole of the top was one sheet of fire.

The roaring and crackling was terrific.

Again and again did the officers cry out aloud to those within to surrender; but on no occasion was any reply vouchsafed to their words.

The fierceness of the heat compelled them from time to time to increase their distance from the flames; but, notwithstanding that, the circle around the building was unbroken.

They were quite certain that neither of those within had left it.

Silence still.

Higher and higher mounted the red flames, fiercer and fiercer they became, but still no change was made, no cry for aid or help came from the lips of those within.

The fire was fast getting a firm hold of the entire building.

Now it was by no means the wish of the chief of the police to burn his prisoners to death.

He would have much preferred to have captured them, and taken them alive to Newgate.

Accordingly, when he found that the door was so far burnt away as not to be able to withstand any resistance, he commanded his men to dash the blazing pile away, and scatter the portions of which it was composed about the clearing.

The door was then fully exposed to view.

It was nothing more than a piece of red-hot wood.

"Forward!" cried the chief, in a loud voice, in spite of the pain which his wound occasioned him. "Forward! forward! down with the door! One blow will do it! Then you have them."

Animated by his words, and determined to put an end to the prolonged and sanguinary contest, the officers made a vigorous dash at the half-burned door.

Now that the heap was removed, the progress of the fire was very greatly stayed.

It raged upon the roof where the thatch was not destroyed, but it had not taken firm hold of the beams.

But the door was in such a state as to enable them to force a way through it.

That they would find their foes helpless and at their mercy they quite anticipated. The interior would be filled with dense, suffocating smoke.

The officers attacked the door with their cutlasses.

It was very different now, though.

Their weapons sank into it easily, and in less than two minutes it was entirely battered down.

Such an immense quantity of black, pungent smoke rushed out that they were compelled to retreat before it.

But a few minutes served to dissipate it, and then they dashed in in a body.

At first they could not credit the evidence of their senses.

The hut was empty.

CHAPTER CXCIH.

THE WOUNDED POACHER SHOWS HIMSELF GRATEFUL FOR THE SERVICES WHICH OUR FRIENDS HAVE DONE HIM, AND MAKES A GOOD RETURN.

To explain the mystery of the extraordinary and incomprehensible disappearance of Blueskin and his two companions, it will be necessary to return to their proceedings, and particularly describe what they were occupied in doing after the repulse of the enemy from the roof, and while the bonfire was made outside the door.

The last discharge which the officers had made was rather a damaging one.

All three were hurt, but fortunately, only slightly.

They were binding up their wounds, when their attention was attracted by the wounded man who had been the unconscious cause of bringing them into this great peril.

From the time of the arrival of the police-officers they had paid no attention to him.

It will be recollected that Johnson had poured a dangerously large quantity of strong brandy down his throat.

It was a case of kill or cure, and had the man to whom the desperate remedy had been applied have been less habituated to the use of ardent drinks than he was, it would certainly have resulted in the former.

But as it so happened, it revived him, though he was some time before he properly recovered his consciousness.

He had been severely hurt, but not mortally, and the swoon into which he had fallen was mainly caused by loss of blood from the system.

The sharp firing, and the noise which had ensued, did not in any way tend to restore him the use of his faculties, and it was not until the time of which we have just spoken that he had been able to come to a clear understanding of what had taken place.

But as soon as he did he called out to our three friends as we have recorded, but his voice was so faint that it could not possibly have been heard outside.

"What is it?" asked Jack Sheppard, who had not all through lost sight of the idea which had occurred to him—namely, that the man would very likely be able to give them some good advice under these perilous circumstances. "What is it?"

He stooped down over the man, who had made several efforts to raise himself, but without success, as he spoke—

"Speak to me," he continued. "Do not exhaust yourself. I shall hear you if you speak no louder than a whisper."

"You have saved me."

"We have, so far."

"The keepers surround the hut—the strong, brave old hut, and you have kept them at bay."

"We have, but not without much trouble. Not only do keepers surround this place, but a large body of police, also!"

"Ah! then we are lost."

"Say you so?"

"You are pursued, then."

"We are."

"Let me think a moment. You are friends?"

"We have shown ourselves such."

"Then I will trust you."

"That is right—but listen."

"What?"

"Our foes are baffled for the moment, but not defeated."

"I know it."

"They will renew the attack in some other way directly."

"I know that too."

"I am glad you understand so well."

"Yes, I have perfectly recovered my senses."

"You are better, then?"

"I think I am."

"I am glad to hear it, but are you aware that we cannot conquer those who are besieging us? do you know that in the end they must either capture or slay us?"

"I do, unless some outlet to the hut is found."

"Just so, that is it. We have searched it round and round, but the only one which we could find was the door."

"Ah! Did you search narrowly?"

"We did."

"Better and better."

"What do you mean—better and better?"

"I mean it is so much the better for us. Hark! what are they about now?"

All listened.

"I know," said Blueskin at length.

"What is it?"

"They are going to employ an agent to turn us out against which we cannot combat."

"What is that?"

"Fire."

"Fire?"

"Yes. They are heaping up brushwood outside the door, and then they will set fire to it, and either smoke or burn us out."

"No—no."

It was the wounded man who spoke.

"What do you mean by 'No—no'?"

"They will neither smoke nor burn us out."

"Then you know of some secret means by which this hut can be left."

"Yes."

"But you must bear one thing in mind."

"What?"

"The police are here in large numbers, and they have formed a complete circle round the hut, so, if we do leave it, we shall fall into their hands."

"No we shan't."

"Well, then, if you know of some secret exit, let us hear what it is at once, or the news will come too late."

"I will tell you."

"What is it, then? Be quick!"

"Raise a little so that I can show you, and stir up the fire so that we can see about us."

Both these things were done.

The hut was now filling rapidly with smoke.

"Do you see yonder chest?" asked the wounded man.

He pointed as he spoke to a very large wooden chest in one corner of the hut.

"Yes, yes. We see it."

"That, then, is the outlet. Promise to take me with you, and I will show you how this place may be left in perfect safety."

"We will readily promise that, since we determined from the first not to abandon you to your enemies."

"Thanks, thanks. You will have your reward. Your danger seems great, but in reality it is nothing. Carry me to the box, and then I will show you how to leave this place."

At this moment they heard those without crying to them to surrender.

But the poacher, if such he was, heard their proposal with a disdainful smile.

He was carried by the joint assistance of the three friends, to the chest in the corner as he desired.

"Open the lid," he said. "It is not fastened in any way, and will yield readily to your hand."

"I know that," said Jack, as he raised the lid of the box. "I have tried it before."

"Oh! have you?"

"Yes."

"And could you find no way out?"

"No; nor can I now."

"Excellent!"

"Why?"

"If you are baffled by it, it makes me hopeful that our pursuers will be equally at fault."

"I trust they will; but how is this?"

"Thus."

The wounded man as he spoke took from his pocket an instrument which looked not unlike a button-hook, and, holding it in his hand, he thrust his arm into the box.

He drew it upwards slowly, and although the exertion required was more than he possessed.

But he managed it, and then the others saw to their admiration and surprise that the hooked instrument was fixed in a small staple at one end of the bottom of the box, and which came up like a door.

"There," said the poacher, in well-pleased accents, "that is such a contrivance as you don't see every day."

"It is excellent," exclaimed Blueskin. "Let me hold it up for you."

The bottom of the box was, in fact, nothing more than a trap-door, but what it covered our friends had yet to learn.

Blueskin asked the question.

"There is a flight of steps," replied the poacher, "below here, and they terminate in an underground passage which leads into some caverns, and those caverns out into the open air upon a hill-side, about three parts of a mile from here."

"Can this be possible?" ejaculated Blueskin, "to think we should have had the means of leaving this dangerous place so close to us, and yet knew it not."

"That often happens," said the poacher. "But you will have to be quick, or we shall after all be too late."

"Let me go first," said Blueskin, "and then Jack will assist you down to me."

"Very good."

Blueskin got inside the chest, and found beneath his feet a flight of steps, which, so far as he could tell, appeared to be formed of nothing but impacted earth.

"Stop a minute," he cried, "there is one thing I have forgotten now."

"What?"

"A light."

"Yes, we shall want a light," said the poacher; "have you one?"

"Yes."

"That is well, then. Make haste, or they will be upon us."

Blueskin had too many times found the utility of having a light about him to ever neglect it and be without one.

From his coat pocket he produced a dark lantern, which, though of diminutive size, was made in the best manner, and emitted a very brilliant light.

He handed this to Jack, and then Johnson took hold of the poacher by the arms and lifted him over the side of the box.

Blueskin received him in his arms.

"How many steps are there?" he asked.

"About twenty."

"We will go first, then. I will carry you. Jack show the light."

Sheppard held the lantern in such a position that its beams were directed down the steps.

Blueskin then carried the poacher down about a dozen

of them, and then he paused for his companions to join him.

This they lost no time in doing, nor were they any too soon.

The hut was almost full of black hot smoke, and the door was red hot.

Johnson came last, and, as he stood on the top step, he shut the lid of the box, and then pulled the bottom after him, leaving it all secure.

The poacher, too, showed him how he could draw a bolt beneath the bottom of the box, which shot in a large iron staple, so that no one could possibly raise it from the other side.

When this was done, a feeling of greater security gathered about the hearts of the fugitives. They, indeed, really began to hope that after all they would be able to escape with their lives.

But it will be seen that they were very far indeed from being out of danger, and they were destined to have a hard struggle for life and liberty.

Having brought things so far, we shall now proceed to relate what took place when the officers forced their way into the hut.

CHAPTER CXCV.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD FOR A TIME SUCCEED IN BAFFLING THEIR FOES.

WHEN the intelligence that the hut was empty was carried to the chief of the police, he refused to believe it.

All wounded as he was, the news gave him such a sudden accession of vigour, that he started to his feet and rushed in.

Then, indeed, he had the witness of his own eye-sight to the truth of what had been said.

"Search the place!" he yelled, "search the place. They must be here. They are hidden somewhere. They cannot possibly escape. Search! search!"

The officers were much enraged to think that their prey had slipped through their fingers when they thought they had it so secure, and they ransacked the place thoroughly.

In the search the chest was not, of course, overlooked.

It was opened more than once, but seeing it was empty the lid was shut down again.

There was no outlet perceivable.

The state of the hut was now such as to make it positively dangerous to remain any longer in it, though the wood, from its being hard and solid, did not burn with that rapidity which might have been expected.

Another officer opened the lid of the box, and as he did so, he held a pistol in the other hand.

Somehow or other, while the lid was raised he dropped his pistol, and it fell upon the bottom of the box.

A hollow sound was produced.

The thought struck him that he had found the secret of the disappearance, and he hastily said as much, while he even asserted that he dropped the pistol intentionally, in order to see whether a hollow sound was returned; but this, we think, was not exactly the truth, and that the discovery was made like many others—by accident alone; although many have afterwards endeavoured to take the credit to themselves.

A closer investigation of course followed, and the result of it was that the bottom of the box covered an open space in the same manner as a trapdoor.

When they had found this out the rest was easy enough. They tried first to move the box bodily, but finding themselves quite unable to do that, they set to work and knocked it to pieces.

The top of the flight of earth steps was at last laid bare to view, and then they prepared to descend.

We will now return to our friends.

Upon reaching the bottom of the steps the found themselves in a vaulted passage hollowed out of the earth, and beaten hard and flat at the floor, roof, and walls.

Along this, by the directions of the poacher, they proceeded for some distance in a tolerably straight line.

The three comrades gazed curiously around them, for all they saw was strange and wonderful.

The poacher was fast recovering from his hurts, or, at any rate, appeared to be doing so.

He walked with tolerable speed, without any more assistance than such as the sides of the passage afforded him.

They paused occasionally to listen for any sounds that would show their pursuers to be on their track, and at length the noise caused by breaking up the box came very plainly to their ears.

This let them know that danger from their foes was far from at an end.

The poacher seemed much troubled when he found the entrance to the secret passage had been discovered.

"Quick! quick!" he said, himself setting the example of going at an increased speed. "Quick! or else they will catch us after all. Make haste! If we can but get a little further we shall be quite safe. Haste! haste!"

The others ran after him as fast as they were able.

And now the passage began to grow much more limited in its dimensions.

The walls were closer together.

The roof lower.

Indications of moisture, which they had not before noticed, made their appearance upon the walls.

"We shall baulk them yet," said the poacher, as he gasped for breath after his exertion. "Look, my friends, there is a large wooden plug above your heads. Pull it—pull it out, I say; but stand aside quickly, for water will follow!"

When they heard these words, our three friends looked up to the ceiling of the passage, and there they saw, depending from it, a piece of wood, shaped something like a plug—that is to say, it was round, and grew thicker towards the bottom.

Blueskin did not stop to hesitate or question, but lifted up his arms, and seized the plug with both hands.

It seemed very firmly imbedded, and he had to work it about, first backwards and then forwards, before he could communicate to it a downward motion.

But he was strong, and soon overcame the resistance offered.

Recollecting the warning he had received, he stepped aside quickly when he felt it coming.

The plug fell to the ground.

Then through the round opening which it had filled up there rushed, with incredible violence, a stream of water about the thickness of a man's arm.

Although they felt a good deal of confidence in the smuggler, our friends viewed this with something like dismay, for how were they to escape drowning?

But the wounded man still urged them forward, and, after going a few yards more, they came to a place where another plug was fixed.

This was also drawn, and the same result followed.

Another and another were pulled out in their hasty progress, and the floor of the passage was ankle deep in water, although for some time it had had an upward tendency.

"A few more yards, and we shall be all right," said the poacher. "There is a door which we can close behind us, and secure, and then I think we can laugh at all pursuit."

"The quicker the better, then, or we shall be afloat."

"No fear—no fear. The main body of the water will flow towards our pursuers, and in three more minutes the lower part of the passage will be full. Ah! here is the door."

At this moment the little party came to a small wooden door.

It was not as large as the passage, but was a small square aperture, considerably above its level.

It was not fastened, and the poacher pushed it open, making a sign for Blueskin to pass through and assist him.

This was soon done, and Blueskin closed the door again. He gave one look down the passage before he did so, and saw that it was literally filled with water.

He was astonished.

The water had rushed in with great swiftness, he knew, but still he could hardly believe that in so short a time a sufficient quantity could have entered to fill up the passage in the way it had.

A more effectual means of putting an end to the pursuit could not have been found, though from what he had already seen, Blueskin could tell that his pursuers were not to be turned aside very easily.

He fastened the door without more ado, and then glanced round to see into what kind of a place fortune had led them.

Jack Sheppard held the lamp, but its services were not

really needed, inasmuch as a soft gentle light very grateful to the vision filled the place.

"Where is this?" he asked.

"This is a cavern," replied the poacher, "beneath some hills. I ought to say it is one of a series of caverns, and as this is the innermost of them all, it is seldom, if ever visited."

"And this light—where does it come from?"

"Through numberless chinks in the roof above. They are too far off, and too small to be distinguished from here."

"And do you think we are safe?"

"I am sure of it. The officers will never follow us; but the sooner you leave the cavern and this part of the country the better."

"Can you guide us out?"

"I can."

"Pray do so, then."

"This way. I don't know who you are, but you have saved my life. That is enough. I want to know no more. When we get to the open air we will separate. I have my own business to attend to."

"We shall ever be grateful to you," replied Blueskin, as he followed his singular guide through the caverns in the direction of the outlet; "for you have rendered us a signal service. Without you we should never have escaped from our enemies."

"You have not quite done so yet; not that I think you will meet with the same lot outside; but then there may be more."

"You seem to have recovered from your wound very rapidly."

"I have. I cannot have been so severely hurt as I at first imagined."

"I am glad to hear it. But are you well enough to shift for yourself?"

"Oh! yes; besides I know not where you may wish to go. I am known to the keepers, and shall have to lose no time in getting out of the kingdom, and I have some to whom I should like to say good-bye before I go."

"Well, well. You have your own way; but if we can do anything to assist you I am sure you can command us."

"No, no. Look! here is the entrance to the caverns."

The poacher pointed to a large opening, after having passed through which our friends found themselves once more in the open air.

"And now we will separate," said the poacher, who seemed impatient to be gone. "Farewell. And it before I go you will condescend to take from me one piece of advice—"

"What is it?"

"Separate yourselves, and go each of you singly to your destination. You will thus have an opportunity of eluding your pursuers, who will before long be upon the track."

"They will. Your advice is good, and shall be adopted. Farewell."

The poacher hastened away, and, turning the sharp angle of the rock, was in a moment out of sight.

Our three friends looked at each other in silence for a little while.

They were breathless, bruised, and tired.

"This is a wonderful night of adventures, Jack," said Blueskin. "I thought at one time that there was no hope for us."

"So did I."

"How strangely that poacher behaved. I cannot half make the fellow out, and do not altogether like his ways. I think the best thing we can do is to be off."

"But not separate as he said?"

"I don't know. At all events let us go on for a little while together in the direction of London."

"Agreed."

"We might then part and each go to separate portions of the town, first arranging where we are to meet."

"Agreed to that."

"Come on, then. You are tired, and so am I; but an effort must be made. We are much too close to the hut to be safe or comfortable. Make all the speed you can. We shall be the downfall of Jonathan Wild yet."

CHAPTER CXCV.

JACK SHEPPARD PURCHASES A BILL CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF HIS ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.

OVER the hard uneven ground, taking their course in as direct a line as possible, running as fast as their fatigued limbs and bruised bodies would allow them, went our three friends.

From time to time they looked back, but they could see no traces of their pursuers.

Gradually their speed abated, and at length their run became a walk, but not until London was in sight in the distance.

"Now, Blueskin," said Jack, "what do you say about our separating. For one, I must have rest, for I am completely knocked up."

"What do you think, Johnson?"

"I think to separate would be the wisest plan."

"Good, then it shall be done."

"Where shall we meet, for I fancy neither of us can tell where he will go."

"You won't want me in the business at all, shall you?" asked Johnson.

"No, my friend," returned Jack, "I do not know that we shall. I hope, however, you will believe how much I feel indebted to you for what you have done in my behalf. You have proved yourself a true friend to me."

"Don't talk about that, Jack—it's nothing, only I would do anything to oblige you and Blueskin there, and I know very well if I was to get into trouble you would not stick at a little to get me out."

"You are right enough there, Johnson, and I think you have exposed yourself quite enough for my sake, and I don't intend to be the means of getting you into trouble by being seen with you again."

"Nonsense."

"But I say it. Blueskin."

"What, Jack?"

"We have a great deal to do before our ends will be accomplished; but do not despair. I trust we shall yet succeed. I have every hope of it, eventually. Now we will separate. Where shall we meet?"

"I leave that to you. Fix the place yourself."

"No, no. You."

"Well then, I should say the best place would be at the foot of King Charles's statue at Charing-cross."

"Why there?"

"Because it is an unlikely place for us to repair to, and not only that, we should not be surrounded very easily."

"Well then, King Charles's statue be it then. At what time?"

"Ten."

"Will that be late enough?"

"Say eleven; the streets will be sure to be empty then."

"It will be safer; and if in the meantime, Blueskin, you can learn anything about Edgworth Bess, pray do so. Tell me all you can about her."

"I will; but at present I believe she is tolerably safe. She is in Jonathan's power, it is true, but he seems to have abandoned his idea of harming her—at least, she is very ill. Steggs is there, and he will watch over and protect her, rest assured."

"I shall wait and long for night. Look, already in the east I can see a faint light which shows that the new day is close at hand. We have no time to lose. I will find a safe refuge and do you the same."

Farewells were then exchanged and all three separated, yet each took the way to London.

At first, the distance between them was but trifling, but it soon increased, until they were no longer visible to each other.

It was just about sunrise when Jack fairly reached London.

The inhabitants of the huge city were not yet astir, and he hurried through the streets at the top of his speed.

It was at the north-western part that Jack entered London.

Suddenly a thought struck him.

He thrust his hands in a moment into his pocket.

He had no money.

This was a serious dilemma.

Had he thought of it earlier, Blueskin would have sup-

plied him, doubtless, but that was not to be thought of now.

"I must have money from somewhere," he muttered: "that is quite certain, but where?"

That was the question.

He looked about him.

As yet he was upon the outskirts of the town.

"Some one must pay toll," he said, "there is no help for it. The first one that passes me will have to stand and deliver."

He turned round a corner as he spoke.

In the distance he saw some one approaching.

Who he did not care to inquire, but walked on unconcernedly to meet him until, being quite close, he raised one of his pistols, and said, in a firm voice—

"Cry out, and you are a dead man!"

The man stopped in a moment, and the cry to which he had half given utterance faded away upon his lips.

Jack held the pistol within an inch of his face.

He could almost see down the barrel.

"Quick," continued Sheppard; "your money—hand it over. Your money, I say!"

"What—what!" said the person addressed, who was a stout, middle-aged gentleman. "Robbed in broad daylight by a boy! Nonsense—nonsense!"

"Do not trifle with me," said Jack, getting irritated.

"I am in earnest, and if you value your life you will do as I desire, for I should think no more of shooting you than I should of shooting yonder sparrow."

"God bless me," said the gentleman, "what a horrid little villain. However, there is nobody in sight, so I suppose I must. Here, take that."

A purse was handed, which Jack took in a moment, and finding it to be tolerably well filled, he darted off with it in a moment, leaving the old gentleman quite confused and astounded in the middle of the road.

He set up an outcry at last; but by that time Jack was out of sight.

In a little while Jack got to the Tottenham-court-road, and down this he went towards St. Giles's.

At that time only a few houses were built in the Tottenham-court-road; but to the left, towards the lower part of it, were several little streets, and turning down one of these Jack stopped at a little public-house, where they were just putting up the shutters.

He went in and obtained a bed, and here he slept until about six o'clock the following evening.

He then rose, and it being quite dark he went out into the street with the intention of finding a shop where he could purchase a new suit of apparel.

In his present attire he considered he should run great risk of being recognised.

Keeping carefully in the shadow of the houses, he stole down High-street, St. Giles's, then as now, rather celebrated for shops where second-hand clothing is sold.

He stopped before one of these houses at the corner of Dudley-street.

It was dark, but yet not dark enough to light the lamps, and this was all the better for Jack, for he by no means wished to be seen.

He stepped inside this shop, and looked out a suit of really beautiful clothes.

They were rather faded and worn, but not particularly so.

They had evidently at one time formed part of the wardrobe of one of the young bloods upon town.

They pleased Jack vastly, and after a good deal of haggling and chaffering, he bought them of the man for about twice as much as they were really worth.

He found upon inquiry that he could change them in a room at the back of the shop, and accordingly retired to do so.

In a little while, for he took great pains with his toilette, he emerged so completely metamorphosed that the man in the shop did not know him.

This pleased Jack vastly, and he liked his new clothes, which became him exceedingly well.

On emerging into the street, he looked up and down uncertain which way to turn.

A crowd of people about halfway down Dudley-street attracted his attention, and he made his way towards it at once, for he was curious respecting it.

Had he been asked, he could have given a tolerable idea of what the crowd was collected for.



[JACK SHEPPARD AGAIN ELUDES JONATHAN WILD.]

It took him but a few minutes to reach it.

In the midst of a mass of ragamuffins of all ages, male and female, was a man with a rather remarkable-looking conical-shaped hat on his head.

This man held up aloft in his right hand a bundle of printed papers, closely printed in smudgy type.

The man was bawling some such words as these—

"Here you are—here you are! A full, true, and particular account—one halfpenny, sir, thank you. Here you have a full, true, and particular account of the life of that notorious housebreaker and highwayman, Jack Sheppard—only one halfpenny each—who was tried at the last Old Bailey Sessions for the murder of his master, John Roots, the carpenter of Wych-street. Only one halfpenny each. You have also a full, true, and particular account of his trial before Justice Powis, and his condemnation to death, together with all particulars, and all for the small charge of one halfpenny—a halfpenny only! You shall read how, after he was placed in the condemned hold along with the other prisoners, and how they passed the time there!

One halfpenny each! One halfpenny each! You shall also read—which is alone worth the money—you shall also read how Jack Sheppard, by the aid of two women, escaped from the prison of Newgate, by breaking off a spike, and crawling through the grating! One halfpenny each, the life, trial, condemnation, and escape, of the notorious highwayman and housebreaker, Jack Sheppard, who is still at large! One halfpenny, sir! Thank you."

Jack, who heard these words, drew nearer to the throng, and at last mingled in it.

The attention of all present was fully absorbed by the man, who continued to speak without intermission.

He could see at the top of the bill a rude cut, representing the manner in which his recent escape had been effected.

The man's wares found a ready market.

They were eagerly bought by those around him.

"It will be a good joke," muttered Jack, half aloud, "it will be a very good joke. I will buy one of those bills myself, and read what it says about me!" Ha! ha!

No sooner did this rash and adventurous thought enter his mind, then he drew forth a halfpenny, and stepping up to the man, placed the coin in his hand, and received one of the printed bills in exchange.

"Sold again!" exclaimed the vendor. "Sold again to thin young gentleman in the velvet suit! Sold again!"

These words had the effect of drawing public attention to Jack in a manner which he found neither desirable nor agreeable.

CHAPTER CXCVI.

RETURNS TO JONATHAN WILD AND RELATES WHAT SUCCESS HE MET WITH IN HIS PURSUIT AFTER BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD.

It will be recollected that after his return from witnessing the execution of Flood and Blewitt, Jonathan Wild had ordered a body of his men to collect together, and had placed himself at their head.

They were every one well mounted, and fully armed.

He led the way up Giltspur-street, for he had made up his mind to track the fugitives like the Red Indians do their prey, and never to rest until he had overtaken and captured them.

He recollected perfectly well which way he had gone on the Saturday evening, and he now went over the same piece of ground, and at tolerable speed, until he reached that spot where he had been wounded.

A savage sort of howl came from his lips, and he glared round about him like some ferocious denizen of the forest.

The great northern road stretched out in front of him so far as his eyes could reach, but there was nothing upon it which indicated the route taken by the fugitives.

He pressed onward for some distance into the open country, until he came to the turning upon the left-hand side of the way which they had taken.

He pulled up here, and his men halted also.

The question entered his mind whether they had turned down there or kept straight on.

There was nothing save chance to enable him to answer the question, and chance did it.

He came to the conclusion that they had diverged from the main path.

Such a proceeding would be natural, because it would offer a chance of escape.

Accordingly, after a few minutes deliberation, he gave the word to his men, and trotted down it.

It was now about mid-day, and the sun was shining high up in the sky, with great brilliancy and power.

All traces of summer had not quite departed, and the scene upon which Jonathan Wild and his men gazed was one of enchanting beauty.

But neither the thief-taker nor his followers were men to appreciate the beauties of nature, no matter how lavishly they might be displayed.

They saw nothing to admire in the gorgeous autumn tints which every hedge and every clump of trees presented; and the twittering of the birds, as they leaped from bough to bough, and the gurgling of a little brook, somewhere close at hand, they passed by unheeded.

But it was in truth a lovely day; such a one as puts new life and vigour into everything, and even Jonathan Wild felt exhilarated, but it was without knowing what had produced the feeling.

Before they had gone far down the lane, the attention of all present was attracted by seeing numberless kites and carrion crows in the air, flapping their wings lazily, as they all settled down in one part.

Jonathan knew what this meant the moment he saw it.

"There is a dead body of some sort close at hand," he said, "that's very clear. Smith, ride forward down the lane, and see what is the other side of yon hedge."

Smith was the name of the man who happened to be riding next to him, and the moment his imperious master spoke he rode off to obey his orders.

A few yards further on he came to a gate, which he pushed open, and entered a field.

Jonathan continued his course at about the same speed as he had all along been going, and arrived at the gate just as the man Smith was coming out again.

"What is it?"

"A dead horse, Mr. Wild."

"A dead horse?"

"Yes; and there's hundreds of birds and insects on it; it's more than half eat away."

"Ah! A horse! Stop a minute, I'll go down and have a look at it."

Wild alighted as he spoke, and left the reins for one of his men to hold.

Passing through the gate, he made his way direct to where Jack and his companions had dragged the horse after it had fallen dead upon the roadway.

As Smith had said, there were hundreds of birds and insects upon it; indeed, it was literally covered with them, and in the distance looked like a large black moving heap; but upon the approach of Wild, the birds rose slowly in the air.

A fearful and horrible spectacle was then presented to Wild's sight.

The flesh had been already half stripped from the bones, and the last rays of the sun caused it to emit a most loathsome smell.

Jonathan turned his eyes away, and scanned the remainder of the meadow.

Almost the first thing he saw was the cart.

He hastened towards it.

But there was very little information to be gleaned by its appearance; still Wild came to the conclusion that the horse and cart he then saw were the same as had served to carry the fugitives.

They might be somewhere close at hand, and in hiding, even now.

At any rate he felt sure that so far he was on the right track.

He turned back into the lane again, and mounted his horse.

"Forward!" he cried, "Forward!" We shall have them at last! I will hunt them down! Forward!"

The troop was quickly in motion, and though they went at a tolerable speed, Jonathan kept an uncommonly sharp look out on both sides of him.

Ere long, however, he saw a cloud of dust on the road before him, which showed that persons were approaching in considerable numbers.

But what sort of people they were, and whether they were mounted or on foot, was more than he could tell, for so dense was the dust, that not even his keen vision could penetrate it.

Soon, however, his ear caught the trampling of horses' hoofs, and as everything that occurred on that road concerned him, as he considered, he called out to his men to halt, and ranged them on one side of the road, in order to see who the new comers were.

They had to wait for a considerable time, for though they were evidently well mounted, yet they came along very slowly.

The dust cleared away as they came nearer, and then Jonathan Wild saw that they were officers of police.

The moment he made this discovery he rode forward to meet them, being anxious to know from them whether they had seen anything of the persons of whom he was in search.

The police-officer who rode first seemed to recognise Jonathan Wild, for he quickened his pace, and was soon by his side.

He touched his hat respectfully. A politic man was that officer, and he knew it was better to be friends with Wild than enemies.

"Good morning, Mr. Wild," he said.

The thief-taker vouchsafed to growl out "good morning" in return, and then he asked—

"Where have you been? What is your business?"

"We have pursued the prisoner who escaped from Newgate."

"Jack Sheppard?"

"Yes."

"And is that your party behind?"

"It is, Mr. Wild."

"And have you got the villain and his accomplices safe in custody?"

"No!"

"No?"

"We tried our best, and thought we should have had them more than once, but they fought like fiends, and succeeded in a most extraordinary manner in getting out of our reach."

"Tell me the particulars."

"With pleasure, Mr. Wild; but would you be good enough to ride forward, sir, and speak to Mr. Lovat, who has the command; he is badly wounded, but you will find him quite conscious, and able to speak to you."

Jonathan hardly waited to hear the end of this speech, but set his horse in motion immediately.

The main body of the officers was now only a short distance in front of him.

He was then able to see why they all came on so slowly.

A few were mounted in front, and each one led a horse by the bridle.

The others were either wounded and being carried on rude and roughly constructed litters, or else they were occupied in carrying them.

Jonathan looked at the scene of slaughter with the utmost surprise, and curiosity was very visibly depicted upon his countenance when he reached them.

Mr. Lovat, as the officer had said, was on one of the litters, which was carried by four men.

These bearers, as they might with propriety be called, were not all officers. Their numbers would have been inadequate; many were labouring people, who had been hired for the purpose.

Mr. Lovat was made aware of Wild's approach, so he ordered the bearers to come to a halt.

He raised himself up then somewhat painfully upon one arm, and looked the thief-taker in the face.

"Well—well, Mr. Lovat," said Wild, with a hideous attempt to be facetious and agreeable. "What's all this been about? You seem as though you had been in a bit of a skirmish."

"Seem!" replied the chief of police, in a voice that was more like a groan than anything else. "Seem, indeed. You mean we have been. Curse Jack Sheppard, and those he had with him!"

"With all my heart," said Wild; "but you do not mean to say that Jack Sheppard, and those two men he had with him, served you all in this fashion?"

"They did; but they must have been leagued with the devil to have done it. Oh! a thousand curses!"

Mr. Lovat fell back on his litter. The pain of his wounds would not allow him to sit up any longer.

Jonathan grinned.

He had no sympathy or feeling for another who was suffering pain. On the contrary, he rather enjoyed their agony than otherwise.

"Keep yourself calm," he said, however; "and tell me what has taken place."

"I will try."

"Are you returning to London?"

"Yes."

"I have just set out, and I have a good body of fresh men with me. Let me know all that has happened. I shall then be better able to act."

"Of course—of course."

"Commence, then. I should have been after the villains long before now, only I received a bullet wound in the head, from which I have not properly recovered; but I shall know no rest until he is once more in my power. Begin—tell me."

Mr. Lovat, in obedience to this command, rather than expressed desire, made Jonathan Wild acquainted with the whole of the exciting and extraordinary incidents which took place in and about the hut in the plantation, and ended where their further progress along the subterraneous passage was stopped by a body of water.

CHAPTER CXCII.

JONATHAN WILD DISCOVERS ONE OF THE DEFENDERS OF THE HUT, BUT NOT THE ONE HE WANTED.

JONATHAN WILD listened to this recital with mingled feelings of anger and admiration.

With all his faults, his follies, and his crimes, he was essentially a brave man, and no one can have perused this history so far without having been made cognizant of the fact.

Such being the case, he could not withhold his admiration of bravery in others, albeit those very persons were those whom he most bitterly hated in all the world.

"But if they went down this underground passage, and

so left the hut, how did they pass the water when you were unable to do so?"

"Ah! that is well asked. At first we were quite puzzled, and I knew not what to think; but in the morning, when we came to make an examination of the ground (for we felt sure they were hiding close at hand) we found one part of a very wide and deep brook which flows through the plantation, completely dry."

"Well?"

"It was the keepers who first noticed the circumstance with wonder, and told us how broad, and deep, and swift the brook was. By their suggestion, we pursued our way along its banks, and at last came to where the water was flowing. Do you understand?"

"Not quite, but perhaps I shall presently. Go on."

"The water had been diverted by some means or other from its accustomed channel, and we soon found what that means was."

"What?"

"The subterraneous passage ran underneath the bed of the brook, which formed the ceiling in one part. This ceiling had been broken, and the water allowed to flow through, which it would have a natural tendency to do."

"I understand you now. You mean to say that they all went down into the passage, and then broke through the ceiling and let in the water."

"That is the conclusion we came to."

"But you could find nothing of them?"

"Nothing. We kept the closest possible watch, and searched all around; but quite unavailingly. They had disappeared."

"Very remarkable," coincided Jonathan, as he let his head fall into the palm of his hand, in an attitude of intense thought.

"It quite baffles me, Mr. Wild. You see I was done for almost at the beginning of the affair, or else, perhaps, things would not be just as they are."

"Probably not. However, Mr. Lovat, you can make your way to London as fast as you like, only leave one of your men as a guide, and I will repair to the plantation, and see what I can find."

"Very well—very well."

"The villains shall not escape me. I have already had no end of trouble with them; but I will fix myself upon their trail, and turn aside for nothing."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Wild, and may, perhaps, be able to find out something. I trust you may; for it is quite time the careers of such daring offenders as these are were put to a termination."

"Curse them!" said Wild.

"With all my heart."

"Where is the man I asked for?"

"You can take Smith, Mr. Wild."

"Very good. He will do; I suppose he knows the place?"

"Quite well."

"That is enough, then. I will proceed at once, and when you get back to Newgate, let it be known that I have set out after the criminals, and that I shall quickly capture them."

"I hope you may, Mr. Wild. Good day."

"Good day," replied Jonathan; and then the course of the little procession was resumed.

Wild put himself at the head of his own men, and had Smith by his side.

It was rather more than a mile from that place to the plantation, so they were not of course, long in reaching it.

They were obliged to dismount there, and proceed on foot, for no horse could have made its way through the dense mass of vegetation.

Jonathan would first of all see the hut, and examine that, which he did with a minuteness that seemed almost unnecessary.

The manner in which the entrance to the subterraneous passage had been hidden elicited his warmest admiration.

He would have descended and gone upon an exploring expedition, but the water had risen to a level with the aperture, and he was unable to do so.

He was next taken to the brook, which did not now present the appearance ascribed to it by the chief of the police, for the water was flowing onward in its ordinary manner, nor was the channel dry in any part.

The reason of this was the passage beneath had got

completely filled with water, and consequently the brook ran on as before.

Through its clear, pellucid waters, however, several breaches in its sandy bottom could be perceived, for when the plugs had been drawn out, the rushing of the impetuous water through the narrow space had made them an enormous size.

With all his cunning and acumen, Jonathan Wild was at fault.

He was more than half inclined to think that the water had rushed in by accident, and that those who were in the passage at the time had perished.

He had, however, no proof of this, and he was very unwilling for this supposition to be confirmed.

He would not have felt satisfied—he would have considered himself balked, cheated of his revenge, if those whom he pursued with so much malevolence had died any other death than that which the hangman would inflict.

Accordingly he endeavoured to banish this idea, and calling to his men, gave them instructions to surround the plantation, and beat up every bush, to make sure that they were lurking nowhere there.

This was a task that occupied some time, but the men set about it in a very systematic manner, and it was very clear that if any one was concealed there they would inevitably be discovered.

For a long time however they had all their trouble for nothing. The only living creatures they disturbed were the legitimate inhabitants of the preserve, who rose in the air and uttered melancholy cries as they were roused from their perches.

Suddenly, however, one body of the men—for they had divided themselves into three portions—made a discovery of importance, if one might judge by the loud cry they set up, and which had the immediate effect of drawing all the others towards them.

Jonathan Wild made a rush to reach the spot.

His janizaries drew back, and allowed him to see a human form.

It was a man, and he was lying extended at full length as though bereft of life.

A glance showed Jonathan that he was unfamiliar with it, and he uttered a yell of disappointment.

But it was Smith who spoke, and what he said served to appease the thief-taker somewhat.

"This is one of those who were in the hut, Mr. Wild."

"Ah! Are you sure?"

"I think so. This, if I mistake not, is the body of the poacher who was first wounded by the keepers, and then took refuge in the hut."

"Is he dead?"

"Not quite, I think."

"Ah! that is well; we shall most likely learn from him what we want to know. It is quite clear he was not drowned by the water in the passage."

"Very clear."

"Raise him up a little, and let us try to extract some information from him. Keep good guard around," he added to his men, "perhaps the others are not far distant."

The janizaries, who had for a minute or two been fully occupied with looking at the poacher, now bestirred themselves, and resumed their search.

The wounded man, in obedience to Jonathan's order, was raised to a sitting posture, and then it could be perceived that he was not quite dead.

He uttered a groan, and there was a convulsive twitching about his eyes as he endeavoured to force them open.

"Hold him still," growled Wild, "and if he has got any life in him we will soon see it. Hold him still."

As he spoke, Wild took from his pocket his everlasting brandy flask, and holding the mouth of it to the man's lips, he poured an immense quantity of it down his throat.

The man gasped and struggled, and seemed upon the point of choking, when he recovered himself and looked around him.

He looked scared and terrified when he saw Wild and his men standing around him, and he made an abortive effort to rise to his feet and fly.

But too firm a hold was kept upon him for any such effort to be successful.

Finding this, and exhausted perhaps by the exertion he had made, he sank into a state of half-unconsciousness.

"Speak," said Wild, "and save your miserable life. Speak, and tell me what has become of the three men who were with you in the hut."

The poacher raised his head, and looked Jonathan in the face.

Then he shuddered, and a gurgling noise made itself heard in his throat.

He was evidently trying to speak.

But his head dropped, and his jaws fell, while his body doubled up into a strange heap.

"Confound him, he's dead!" cried the thief-taker, exasperated at this unexpected event. "Confound him, he's dead! Let us try more brandy."

More brandy was tried; but the fiery spirit had lost its potency.

The man was quite dead, and beyond its revivifying influence.

Jonathan swore in a most awful manner for five minutes, at the end of which time he had exhausted his vocabulary.

He had made sure of hearing something from this man; but he was defeated of his expectation.

But he turned with all the greatest energy to continue his search about the spot.

As the reader knows, his search could only have one result.

Those for whom he so assiduously sought were far away from there.

But Jonathan would not leave until he had thoroughly searched the neighbourhood.

At last, and most reluctantly, he was obliged to turn back towards London without having achieved anything.

Our readers can, without much difficulty, picture his frame of mind, for they have more than once perceived the amiable effect which disappointment had upon his temper.

Woe to the unfortunate individual who crossed his way.

But though he turned towards London, he had by no means given up his search.

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

JACK SHEPPARD MEDITATES UPON HIS POSITION, AND RESOLVES TO SHOW HIS ENEMIES THAT THEY HAVE NOT CRUSHED HIM YET.

JACK SHEPPARD crushed the paper which he had just purchased in an angry manner, and thrust it into his pocket.

He was annoyed to think that attention should be so pointedly directed towards him.

But he had scarcely any one to blame but himself—he had merely purchased for bravado's sake.

Taking no further notice of the idle, gaping throng, he turned round the first corner he came to, and in a moment was out of sight.

He continued walking for some little time, and then found himself in Soho.

This was a quiet quarter of the town, and he looked about him in search of some quiet-looking out-of-the-way public-house, where he could stop until the time came when he had his appointment with his comrade.

He was not long in finding that of which he was in search.

A few paces down the street he saw a projecting sign, but there was not light enough for him to see what was painted upon it.

Nor did he care to know.

The exterior of the place pleased him; it seemed to be just the place he wanted, and he entered.

He walked down the passage to the bar, and asked a girl who was standing there whether he could have a private room for an hour or two.

He was replied to in the affirmative, and, taking a small hand-lamp in her hand, the girl conducted him to a scantily-furnished room upon the first-floor.

Jack was hungry and thirsty, and having no idea what would happen during the next few hours, he determined to make a good meal while he had the opportunity.

He gave his orders accordingly, and a plentiful repast was spread before him, of which he partook heartily.

This over, he turned round to the fire, and bethinking himself of the paper he had purchased, he drew it from his pocket and began to read.

The document was a tolerably good specimen of its class. The top of it was adorned with a rude representation of the manner in which Jack had been drawn between the two spikes.

Then followed a tolerably accurate account of all that had occurred, with such exaggerated embellishments as the public taste craved for, and ended with the string of verses which invariably form an adjunct to such performances.

Jack read it through to the end, and then he dropped the hand that held the paper between his knees.

He gave himself up for the first time to a little serious reflection.

Little by little the whole of his past life was brought before him.

The retrospection was not a pleasant one.

Still, for all that, he pondered deeply over it.

The larger share by far of his thoughts was, however, bestowed upon Edgworth Bess.

He recalled to mind the strange manner in which he had first heard of her, and the still stranger circumstances under which their meeting had taken place.

There needed no one to tell Jack that he passionately loved her. He could feel it—he knew it; he knew as well that his passion was hopeless—that it could never be requited.

There was such a gulf between them that he could never cross.

But though he knew all this, he made not the slightest attempt to quench his love. He felt that so long as his heart beat in his bosom, he should love her.

It was a kind of love rarely indeed met with.

Unselfish love.

All he desired was her welfare and happiness. He felt how glad he would be to lie down and quit this life of turmoil, could he but first see the heiress triumph over her enemies, and be instated in her just possessions.

The more Jack thought, the more sad he grew.

There was a bottle of wine upon the table, and he drank of it repeatedly; but such was his state of mind, that his spirits were in no way cheered thereby.

Indeed it took no more effect upon him than if he had drunk so much water.

There was a half-choked feeling in his breast which rose up every moment in his throat, and which required all his self-control to keep down.

Poor Jack! his indeed had been a sad, sad life, and there was little prospect of its reaching a happy termination.

He could trace all, however, to the evil operations of the arch-fiend, Jonathan Wild.

He had all through been his malignant destiny, and pursued with untiring inveteracy.

To be sure, up to now, Jack had baffled and set at naught all the attempts he had made upon his life and liberty, but every day his position grew more complicated and embarrassing.

His life was forfeit to the laws of his country. He was a felon condemned to death.

He groaned bitterly.

But he cast aside as much as he could all recollection of himself.

He felt that to dwell upon the theme could do no good, and in the end unnerve and unfit him to carry out the plans which he had formed.

He turned the whole of his thoughts to a consideration of the position of Edgworth Bess.

His determination was this.

He would continue his desperate fight against adverse fate until he had seen her safe, and then—then he should be quite ready.

He trusted still to live to accomplish the downfall of Wild. Could he but see that, he felt that he should die with one pang the less.

Whether he will do this the history will unfold. It must be remembered that three determined persons were all working to one end.

Jack Sheppard.

Blueskin.

Steggs.

Jonathan Wild certainly trends upon very dangerous ground.

But he was a man of no common order, and a match generally to all who opposed him.

It will be seen that Jack's reflections all ended in the same place.

If he thought of himself, his heart rose in revenge against the thief-taker.

If he thought of Edgworth Bess, there were her wrongs to be avenged.

Such being the conclusion of his reflections, he dwelt upon it in every possible way.

He taxed his ingenuity to the utmost in the endeavour to decide upon some plan which would procure Wild's annihilation.

And as he thought and pondered upon his revenge, as his multitudinous wrongs rose up palpably before him, his brain grew heated, his blood boiled.

The wine then began to show its effects.

There was a clock in one corner of the room, and Jack glanced up at it.

There were yet two good hours to elapse before his appointment with Blueskin.

"I will play them all a trick," he said. "I will let Jonathan Wild and all the rest of the world know that I am not vanquished yet."

What idea it was which Jack had got into his head the reader will very quickly see.

He rang the bell, and called for pens, ink, and paper.

These materials for writing were placed before him.

"I will write to Mr. Applebee first," he said. "Now to begin!"

Jack was not much of a writer, but he soon set down on paper that which follows, in a hand so plain that no one could misread it.

"Safe out of Newgate.

"Mr. Applebee, printer of dying speeches, in Blackfriars.

"Sir,—I have just purchased one of your papers about my life, trial, and escape from Newgate. I must own I read it with very great interest, and I daresay a good many will do the same, which will answer your purpose and put money in your pocket.

"I write these lines to you in case you should want a second edition. If so, you can put this letter at the foot by the way of a postscript, and I beg to tell you that the person who leaves this at your house is no other than

"Your very humble servant,

"JOHN SHEPPARD."

This characteristic epistle needs no comment, and scarcely any explanation.

Mr. Applebee was the name of the man who had printed the bill which Jack had bought in the street, and whose trade chiefly consisted in the production of such documents.

Jack deliberately folded up the letter and sealed it.

"Now for Mr. Noakes," he said. "He shall be favoured."

He then wrote as follows:—

"Mr. Noakes.

"Sir,—I trust you won't be offended with me for leaving your mansion without bidding you good-bye. I was very loath to do it, but circumstances compelled me. I shall be much grieved, too, if you get into any trouble on my account.

"I write these few lines to say that I am safe and well, but not very rich, and cannot afford to pay the postage of this letter, so I will call and leave it at the lodge-gate myself, and ask the man on the lock to deliver the same to you with all speed.

"Give my compliments to Mr. Jonathan Wild, and tell him from me that I live in hopes of seeing him tucked up at Tyburn some fine morning.

"From your very humble servant,

"JOHN SHEPPARD."

Jack laughed when he finished this letter, but having done so, he folded it up, and addressed it to the governor of the prison.

"This will astonish them, I take it," he said. "It will show them that I am not at all down-hearted. Let me see, there will be a tolerable reward for me now. How mad they will both be when they find how near they were to earning it. Ha! ha! I am off now. I will deliver these letters at once."

He slipped them into his pocket as he spoke and called for the girl.

Then, having paid his reckoning, he put on his hat, and set out upon his perilous and, we think, foolhardy errand.

CHAPTER CXCIK.

JACK SHEPPARD KNOCKS AT THE DOOR OF NEWGATE, AND DELIVERS THE LETTER TO THE MAN ON THE LOCK.

TERRIBLE and spirit-crushing as were the numerous incidents in Jack's life, that which we have just recorded will serve to show that they had not succeeded in wholly extinguishing that love of fun, frolic, and bravado which, in happier days, had formed a distinguishing feature in his composition.

We think the letters themselves quite sufficient to make the reader understand what he intended to do.

No good could possibly come of it.

He was exposing himself to an unnecessary risk, and his enemies would be still more exasperated with him.

But he determined to show his pluck, as he called it.

He walked with a hasty and confident step in the direction of Mr. Applebee's, the printer.

The hour was late, and few people were abroad.

A steady, persevering, uncomfortable rain, too, was falling, and had been falling for a long time, and it was this that had in a great measure tended to clean the street of people.

Jack himself soon found this inconvenient; and a hackney-coach happening to come by, he hailed it, and directed the coachman to drive him to Blackfriars-bridge.

Upon reaching this place, which they did without the occurrence of any particular incident, Jack alighted, and having paid his fare, walked the remainder of the distance.

The printer's address had been given in full at the foot of the bill he had purchased; and as the locality was well known to him, he found it easily enough.

It was a poor tumble-down looking tenement in a back street, and from its windows there came but one solitary ray of light.

There was a knocker on the door and a bell-handle on the door-post, so Jack applied himself to both means of summoning admission, and made the quiet street echo and ring again.

The appeal was answered in a little while by a man who had on over his clothing a white apron.

"What the devil do you want?"

To this polite interrogation, Jack replied—

"Is this Mr. Applebee?"

"Which Mr. Applebee do you want?"

"The one that prints the dying speeches."

"That is my name," said the man at the door.

"You are Mr. Applebee himself?"

"I am."

"That's all right then."

"What's all right?"

"I have got a letter for you."

"Who from?"

"Stop a minute."

Jack felt in his pocket and produced the letter.

"There it is," he said; "there is no answer."

As he spoke these words, he placed the letter in the hands of Mr. Applebee, and darted off into the darkness in a moment, and was out of sight before the printer had time to break the seal.

He did not run far, because of the fear he had of attracting attention by so doing.

"That is done," he said. "I wonder what he thinks of it. I have lost half of the fun now. I should have liked to have seen him when he found it all out. However, I must be content. Now, here goes for Mr. Noakes."

The distance to Newgate was not very great, so he preferred to walk.

In a little while the gloomy walls of the huge prison appeared before him.

An uncomfortable sensation swept over him when he first caught sight of it, but he quickly banished the feeling.

He had the letter in his grasp, so running up the little flight of stone steps before the wicket door leading into the lodge of Newgate, he knocked loudly at it.

The man on the lock dashed aside the piece of wood which covered the circular grating, and asked what was wanted.

"A letter for the governor," said Jack.

There was something in his voice which sounded familiar to the janitor, and he peered cautiously through

the bars, but the night was too dark for him to distinguish Jack's features.

Nor did Sheppard wait for any lengthened scrutiny.

He pushed the letter between the grated aperture, and said—

"Give that to Mr. Noakes—there's no answer."

He ran down the steps as he spoke; but the man on the lock, whose suspicions were aroused, dashed open the door, while he called out to one of his comrades who was sitting in the vestibule—

"Ned—Ned! follow that chap that's just brought the letter. Hang me if I don't believe it was Jack Sheppard."

"Oh! gammon."

"Make haste. Run after him and catch him. If I am right, it will be a good thing for us, and if I am wrong it don't much matter."

Ned seemed to see the force of this reasoning, for he darted down the steps in pursuit of Sheppard.

But Jack was nowhere within sight or hearing. He had crossed the street, and hurried down one of the numerous courts that abound there.

As he did so, he heard St. Paul's clock chime a quarter to eleven.

He would have to make haste to keep his appointment with Blueskin at King Charles's statue at eleven.

Finding the streets now completely deserted, he went at a run, which soon enabled him to get over the ground.

If anything, the night changed for the worse.

The rain came down more heavily.

Jack was already soaked to the skin.

In spite of the great speed he made, however, he did not reach Charing-cross until some few minutes past the hour agreed upon.

He approached the large open space cautiously, and glanced all around him, to see whether any of his foes were lurking about.

But all seemed clear, so he crossed over, making his way direct for the statue, though such was the murkiness of the night, he could not see it until he was close to it.

There was no one there, apparently; but having pronounced the word Blue, in a low tone of voice, it was instantly responded to by the appearance of Blueskin.

He had been standing in the shadow of the stonework a few paces off.

"You are late, Jack."

"I know it; but I could not get here sooner."

"All right—a few minutes are of no importance."

"Are we quite safe here?"

"I think so."

"I looked round me carefully before I drew near."

"So did I."

"I saw no one."

"Nor I."

"I think we may venture upon saying we have the place all to ourselves, and Blue, tell me—do not keep me in suspense a moment—have you heard anything of—of Edgworth Bess?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Be calm, and not impatient."

"I can, while anything else is spoken of. Your best course will be to tell me all you know at once."

"I saw Steggs, then. Jonathan Wild is from home, or was from home when I saw him. He had set out at the head of twenty men in pursuit of us."

"Ha!"

"Steggs took the opportunity to slip out, and I was fortunate enough to see him. Do you know the position Steggs occupies in Wild's household?"

"Not precisely. You have had no opportunity of explaining things fully."

"No more I have. Well, then, you may take this for granted—we have not a better friend, nor Edgworth Bess a more devoted adherent than her old enemy, Steggs."

"You told me that before, but I mistrust the man."

"I think you hardly just. However, we met together, and decided to accomplish Wild's destruction. We were both to unite and work to that end, exclusively of all others. Steggs made a proposal of a more daring nature than I could have given him credit for. It was to disguise himself, and seek employment of Jonathan—to

pretend to be his most faithful servant—to worm himself into all his secrets—and in the end to destroy him.”

“A capital, but most dangerous plan.”

“Those were my own words, but he was bent upon it, and as no one else but himself would be involved in the consequences, I could not well say nay. He went, saw Jonathan, and, strange to relate, was engaged at once.”

“That is very strange indeed. I gave Jonathan credit for more penetration than to allow himself to be imposed upon like that.”

“But you must take into consideration the powers of dissimulation which Steggs possesses.”

“And so must you and I, Blueskin, to see that he does not act treacherous to us.”

“I do not think there is much fear! His heart is filled with desire to be revenged upon Wild and Lord Donnull, our two greatest enemies, and you know what a powerful motive that is.”

“I do; and yet sometimes gold will purchase it!”

“That I will not deny, Jack; but let me continue.”

“Go on.”

“Jonathan fell into the trap! All this happened during your imprisonment. On the morning of the trial, Jonathan, of course, was present in the court.”

“I saw him.”

“To be sure you did! Well, that was the first chance Steggs had of exploring the upper part of Wild’s house. He knew that Edgworth Bess was a prisoner up stairs, so he crept up carefully, with the intention of speaking to her if possible, and telling her that she had a friend close at hand.

“He wished to make no more noise than possible, for he did not know who might be upstairs. When he got to the second landing he heard a door open, and crouched down in a dark corner to listen, and terrified to death lest it should be some one about to descend. His fears were, however, groundless. It was Jonathan’s mistress, Mary Milliner: she was muttering to herself, but Steggs could not catch the purport of her words. He saw, though, that she held a long, bright knife in her hand.”

“A knife?”

“Listen! She approached a door, which she opened with a skeleton key. Then she passed through it. Steggs followed on tiptoe. You can guess the intention of Mary Milliner. It was to murder Edgworth Bess, of whom she was jealous! But Steggs was just in time to prevent her. He dashed in, and seized her wrist just as it was about to descend. He was not strong enough to prevent the blow, but he averted it, and the knife was buried to the hilt in the clothing of the bed, leaving Edgworth Bess terrified, but unhurt!”

CHAPTER CC.

BLUESKIN MAKES A VERY TEMPTING PROPOSAL TO JACK SHEPPARD.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Jack, wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement by this narration; “can a woman have attempted such an atrocity?”

“She attempted it, and had it not but have been for the presence of Steggs she would have consummated her purpose. When she saw him she turned round and attacked him like a maniac. Steggs felt that he was no match for her—that she was stronger than he was. Anxious to end the struggle, then, and exasperated with her for her attempt, he took the knife and stabbed her to the heart.”

“This is wonderful,” ejaculated Jack. “Thank heaven, the poor girl escaped that peril.”

Jack was much affected when he thought of the great danger from which the heiress had so providentially escaped.

“But come,” said Blueskin, “I have much to tell you, and as it is so wet a night we shall get soaked to the skin if we stay here. I think I know a safe place close at hand upon the river side. Let us adjourn there.”

“If you think it will be safe.”

“I’ll warrant that.”

“Let us go, then, for I am cold to the very bone. We shall have to decide upon the future.”

“True.”

“Continue your narration while we walk.”

“I intended to do so, but we shall reach our destination in a few moments.”

Blueskin struck across the large open space as he spoke, with Sheppard close at his side, who related to him the whole of the strange events that had taken place at Jonathan Wild’s house.

Jack was filled with wonder and astonishment at the strange concatenation of events which had led to the thief-taker selecting Steggs as a kind of confidant, and placing him (Steggs) where he most wished to be.

“I have seen Steggs since we parted, Jack,” continued Blueskin. “I have already hinted as much.”

“What did he say?”

“Edgworth Bess had heard of your escape from Newgate with unfeigned pleasure, and trusted that you would succeed in getting to a place of ultimate safety.”

“Did she—did she believe me innocent?”

“She did. When Steggs told her of the crime of which you were accused, she expressed, in the strongest terms, her conviction that you were not guilty.”

“Thank heaven for that.”

“Hush! Here we are at the place of which I spoke.”

They halted before a dim gloomy-looking building as Blueskin spoke.

Sounds of boisterous revelry came from its interior.

“Take hold of my arm, Jack, and we will enter. That is it.”

He ascended a couple of steps, and knocked in a peculiar fashion at the door.

It was opened in obedience to the summons, and Blueskin uttered some kind of password to the man in a low tone of voice, and the pair were admitted.

The place which the two comrades now entered was one of those establishments designated by the fraternity who frequented them, a “ken.”

The man who admitted them closed the door immediately.

They were then standing in the passage, but it was so intensely dark that nothing whatever was visible.

Blueskin, however, was one of those who had been initiated into the mysteries of the place; so he walked forward for several yards with a confident step, and then he said—

“Stairs, Jack. Take care how you descend.”

The caution was given just in time.

They were at the top of a steep flight of stairs.

Descending these, they were addressed in a gruff voice by an invisible personage as soon as they reached the bottom.

Blueskin replied, and then a door was opened through which they passed, and then a singular scene was presented to Jack’s notice.

Before him was a long and not very well lighted room, at one end of which the door was placed upon the threshold of which he stood.

This room was filled with a motley company, seated round tables upon miscellaneous articles which were not at all suitable for seats.

Some thirty or forty were present, mostly of the male sex, though here and there a woman could be seen.

All, without a single exception, were engaged in talking, smoking, and drinking, and such a hubbub arose from them as to be quite deafening to the ears until they became accustomed to the din.

Blueskin did not give Jack much time, however, to contemplate this scene, for he led the way across the apartment—if such a word could be applied to such a place—to the obscurest corner, where they sat down.

For a few moments Jack could not listen to anything, until he had satisfied himself by looking curiously around him.

Blueskin, however, touched him on the arm, and said—
“Do not seem too much surprised at what you see here, or you will draw suspicion upon us. Attend to what I have to tell you.”

“Begin.”

“Directly.”

A man approached them.

He was the waiter for the establishment.

Blueskin ordered brandy and water for both.

They were quickly served.

Every moment saw some fresh arrival at the place.

Blueskin was known by many there, but he did not wish

to be recognised, so he turned away his head, and drew his hat down over his face.

He bid Jack do the same, and they resumed their conversation in a tone of voice very little above a whisper.

"Steggs told me that Edgworth Bess was very much better, and more contented with her lot. He still remained outside her door as a kind of guard. He thinks Jonathan Wild intends no harm to her at present. Indeed, he is so much occupied with your affair that he has no time for anything else!"

"But what are we to do with her, Blue? It will never do to leave her where she is. Besides, it is quite time we did something for her. Think what a time the business has been under hand, and we are no more advanced than we were at first."

"I grant that; but, then, think of the tremendous difficulties we have had to contend with."

"I know we have, but we ought to see to it at once now."

"Yes, I have been thinking of it. You must understand that Edgworth Bess is under age, and that she cannot enter upon possession of her estates until she has obtained her majority."

"I have heard something of that."

"Jonathan's policy is at once simple and atrocious. Lord Donnull is wholly in his power. He can do with him what he likes—annihilate him in fact. He keeps him now just to answer his own purposes. Edgworth Bess he keeps a prisoner. So soon as she is of age, which cannot be many months' hence, she will be responsible for her own actions."

"Well?"

"Then he will force her into a marriage with him, and, by virtue of that marriage, obtain possession of the estates."

"The monstrous villain!"

"It is an awful and abhorrent idea; but while I live he will never carry it out. Now look here."

"What?"

"It appears to me that we cannot do better than set about first of all releasing Bess from her place of confinement."

"I shall agree to that, for I shall know no rest until she is free."

"But you must think what you must do after you get her at liberty."

"Ah! there is that."

"Neither you nor her will be safe in England."

"True."

"Jonathan Wild would discover you sooner or later, and then things would resume their old aspect, only there would be all the less chance of putting them right."

"I am quite aware of that, and I can tell, too, that you have some plan in your mind. Let me know it."

"Willingly. I will submit it to your approval."

"Speak on. I am full of curiosity and anxiety to hear."

"It is this. Suppose we set Bess at liberty, and then for you to fly from England with her to some foreign country, and remain there until she should come of age."

"I see."

"Then let her return. She will not have much trouble to gain her rights. When she is properly acknowledged, she will have great influence, and if she uses it, will doubtless be able to procure your pardon."

Jack's eyes glistened as he heard these words.

His heart swelled, and renewed hope animated his frame. Those few words seemed to give him a new lease of life.

Bright visions—visions, alas! never to be realized, flitted through his mind.

He felt courage and strength to go forth single-handed, and meet all his enemies and vanquish them.

"You approve of the plan, then?" asked Blueskin.

"Approve of it?" iterated Jack. "How can I do otherwise? Oh! that is indeed a glorious plan. Do you really think that it can be realized?"

"I do. There is only one thing stands in the way."

"What is it?"

"An obstacle than can be overcome."

"I breathe again."

"It is this. What we have planned cannot be carried out without money—and money, too, in no inconsiderable

quantity. I need not tell you that neither of us possess it."

"I had forgotten that," said Jack. "That is indeed an obstacle. How is to be overcome?"

"That requires some consideration."

"Have you considered of it?"

"I have."

"And what is the result?"

"First, tell me whether you see the necessity of having it."

"I do fully."

"And can you see as well how useless it will be for us to achieve her freedom without we have the money in hand to carry out the enterprise?"

"I do, indeed."

"That is well, then. I wanted to impress those two things deeply on your mind."

"Why?"

"You shall know presently. Can you tell how the money could be quickest and best obtained?"

"No—no."

"Then I will tell you, and I shall try your mettle. The king's highways are open to you. Levy a toll upon all passengers. There is room now for a brave, daring knight of the road, who, with his faithful steed, will take up his position and boldly cry, 'Stand and deliver!' to whoever he might meet."

CHAPTER CCL.

JONATHAN WILD ATTACKS THE "KEN" UPON THE RIVER'S SIDE, AND JACK SHEPPARD HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF DEATH AND CAPTURE.

THERE was a brief interval of silence after Blueskin spoke.

The words he uttered sank deeply into Jack's mind, and made a deep impression upon it.

There was something tempting and inviting in the proposal. Jack was no stranger to the wild delights of a life on the road, and he thoroughly enjoyed them.

The plan seemed a feasible one, and surely no other could be found which would be so likely to insure success.

Blueskin did not break in upon his meditations, but allowed him full time to reflect.

At length Jack looked up with a composed countenance, and then he addressed himself to him.

"What is your decision, Jack, now that you have weighed it over in your mind? Does it meet with your approbation?"

"It does, for I can think of no other."

"Give me your hand, then. Believe me to-day I have thought deeply of all this, and I am glad to find that you agree with the conclusions I have come to."

"I do, but think of the risk. The Knight of the Road perils his existence at every moment."

"And is not yours already forfeit?"

"Ah! yes, I had forgotten that."

"I thought so. Come, Jack, take a bold heart. Rely upon it, if you think for a month, you will not be able to find anything better."

"But how long will it take me to get the sum of money I require?"

"That depends upon your luck. Perhaps a week or two only."

"A week or two?"

"Yes; does that appear so very long that you utter the words in such a tone?"

"No, no; but Bess."

"She will be safe. Steggs will guard her from Wild; and should any change in his tactics take place, I shall know it at once, for he knows where he can find me at any moment."

Jack seemed only half satisfied.

He would have liked to have seen Bess free from Wild's clutches at first, and then he could have gone to work with better spirit.

But that was not to be thought of.

His ruminations, however, met with a sudden and violent interruption.

There was a crashing sound—the war of many voices.

A shrill whistle was sounded.

Every one within the apartment rose to his feet, and a scene of the greatest confusion ensued.

"The redbreasts are upon us! Fly—fly!"



[JONATHAN WILD HAS A CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW WITH LORD DONMULL.]

These words were uttered by some one near Jack, and he next moment the light which illumined the place was extinguished.

The darkness was that of the grave.

Blueskin caught Jack by the arm.

"The officers!" he said.

"What are they doing here?"

"I know not; but they have made an attack upon the place."

"Have you ever heard of such a thing before?"

"Oh! yes; when they have had any idea that a person of any importance was here."

"What do you mean?"

"A person whose capture was desired, or for whom a large reward was offered."

"And they are here now!"

"Yes."

"Is it Wild?"

"I have no idea."

"Do you think we can have been tracked here?"

"I know no better than yourself."

"There is a general move. What is to be done?"

"Keep still a moment!"

"I will not move."

"Pray do not; or, in this darkness, if you were once to get separated from me, I should never find you again. Do not be impatient. Every impediment possible will be thrown in the way of those who wish to enter, and if the worst comes to the worst we shall have to fight for it."

"Can we not leave this place?"

"We could leave the apartment which we are now in, but the house is doubtless well surrounded at every point, so that there would be no getting away."

"But we must not stay here and be captured."

"Certainly not. Hark! Do you hear that?"

From somewhere outside they heard a man speak in a loud tone.

There was no mistaking the voice.

It was Jonathan Wild.

"There are two here," he said, "to-night. Give them

up, and I will not trouble the rest, but depart at once with them. They are Jack Sheppard and Blueskin. They have been watched here, and the place is surrounded, so that they cannot escape. Give them up, and the rest of you may go free."

A momentary silence followed this speech, and then a voice cried—

"Down with Jonathan Wild! Down with him! Who can trust Jonathan Wild? Down with him! You are here in strong force to-night, my lads. Down with him, I say! Down with him; and as for giving up Jack Sheppard, that would be a shame."

"Down with him!" repeated at least fifty voices. "Hurrah! Down with him! Hurrah for Jack Sheppard, the prince of housebreakers! Hurrah!"

"You heard that?" he said.

"Yes."

"It is all right. Jonathan won't take us in a hurry. He will have to fight well."

"But cannot we leave this place? I am impatient to begone."

"Quietly. Follow me."

Still keeping his grasp upon Jack's arm, Blueskin made his way across the underground apartment.

From the other end, however, there came a bright flash of light.

Jack turned back to look.

Jonathan Wild, with a body of his men at his back, nearly every one of whom carried torches in their left hands, stood upon the threshold.

Their appearance was greeted with a yell from the throats of the members of the "family," and, armed with such weapons as they could conveniently lay their hands upon, they rushed forward and attacked Wild.

Of all that large and disorderly assemblage, there probably was not one who had not a personal feeling against the thief-taker.

He was their individual and collected enemy.

With respect to Jack Sheppard, there was not one of the lawless crew who did not regard him with feelings of the utmost admiration.

That he should triumph over Jonathan as he did, gave them unbounded pleasure.

And, then, to think that he should have twice performed the unparalleled feat of breaking out of Newgate, made them look upon him as some one quite out of the common way.

If he was there amongst them—and they had little doubt about the correctness of Wild's information—they made up their minds he should not be taken prisoner without a desperate struggle upon their part to prevent it.

In this place we may as well relate how it was that Wild came to know the precise whereabouts of our two friends.

We left him last, after his bootless search in the plantation, on his way back to London, having come to the conclusion that in the great city was the most likely place to find them.

Jonathan Wild very well knew he had in his house a species of leadstone, which would prevent Jack from going very far away from it for any length of time.

That leadstone was Edgworth Bess.

And so, calculating upon the affection of his victim, he turned towards London.

Patience, he thought, and then Jack would walk into his hands.

Without the occurrence of any incident, he reached London.

But when he drew up to the door of his own house in Newgate-street it was quite dark, being between nine and ten o'clock at night.

He dismounted quickly, and left his steed for his men to take care of.

Then, as if struck with a sudden thought, he did not enter his own house, but turned round the corner into the Old Bailey.

He paused before the lodge gate.

As he went up the little stone steps which led to it, and as he knocked at the door, he could tell that something of an extraordinary character was taking place within.

He peered through the iron spikes above the door, and knocked again—for his first summons was taken no notice of at all.

He roared out at the same time to the man on the lock.

The door was opened directly it was seen who sought for admission.

"What's the matter?" growled the thief-taker. "What's the matter?"

Mr. Noakes came forward.

He held a letter in his hand.

"Would you believe it?" he said.

"Believe what?"

Mr. Noakes made no reply.

He simply handed the letter to Wild,

The thief-taker read it from beginning to end without a word.

He could not believe that what he saw was real.

He read a second time; and then, when he found there could be no sort of doubt about the reality of what he saw, he burst out into some most remarkable curses, which even had the effect of astonishing all the turnkeys.

"Ten thousand devils!" he cried. "How long have you had this letter?"

"Not ten thousand seconds!" said the governor.

"Curses upon my delay! I should have been here sooner. Do you think this young devil's imp really brought the letter, or is it a trick of his?"

"Goggs here, who was upon the lock, is quite sure of it. He knew him in a moment, and sent Ned after him, but there was no signs of him to be seen."

"And yet he walked under your very noses. Curse him! I can't help admiring him for his courage, but he hasn't got far off, I'll wager; and I will have him back in his cell before morning."

"I only hope you will," said Mr. Noakes.

CHAPTER CCII.

JONATHAN WILD REACHES THE LODGE OF NEWGATE ABOUT FIVE MINUTES TOO LATE.

JONATHAN WILD ran down the steps into the Old Bailey.

He swore awfully all the while, and, had he worn his own hair instead of a wig, he would doubtless have torn it off by handfuls, and cast it down at his feet in the extremity of his rage.

So little time had been occupied in his visit to the prison, that the men he had left at his door, though they had dismounted, had not dispersed, but were standing in the street in a body, with their bridles in their hands.

"Mount!" he cried, as soon as he saw them. "Mount, curse you! and follow me. Jack Sheppard is here under our noses!"

Upon hearing this announcement, the men, who had been offered a good round sum each for securing Jack, scrambled into their saddles with great alacrity.

Jonathan Wild did the same, and putting themselves at their head, he trotted down the Old Bailey.

But though both he and his gang cast their eyes right and left as they passed down the thoroughfare, they could not see any signs of the person they so much wished for.

In a few minutes they emerged on to Ludgate-hill, then a much more steep and dangerous descent than it is now.

The fine rain which had been falling so steadily all the evening, had made the hill very slippery indeed, and such was the dangerous condition it was in, that Jonathan had to rein in his steed, and proceed down it at a walking pace.

Just before he reached what is now Farringdon-street, but which was then Fleet Market, his attention was attracted by a man who was running on the pavement.

This man, whoever he was, no sooner saw Wild than he changed his course, and ran straight to him.

Jonathan drew a pistol, for he did not know whether this new comer was friend or foe, but he judged it was more likely to be the latter than the former.

"Mr. Wild, Mr. Wild! Is that you? Is that you, Mr. Wild?"

"What if it is?" growled Jonathan.

"I know it is; I can tell your voice. How lucky I have met with you."

"What is it?"

"Don't you know me?"

"No."

"Stevens, Stevens; I'm Stevens."

"All right," said Jonathan.

He restored the pistol to his pocket.

Stevens was one of the men in the regular police force who were friendly to Wild.

The importance of having men of this description is obvious.

They put Jonathan on the track of many things which he would have known nothing about.

"What is the news?" asked Jonathan. "Anything important?"

"Yes."

"Is it about Jack Sheppard?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall be rewarded amply. I am now in search of him. Have you seen him?"

"Not a quarter of an hour since."

"Where, where?"

"And Blueskin with him."

"Ah!"

"I did, Mr. Wild, and so I ran off to find you."

"Where did you see them?"

"At Charing-cross."

"At Charing-cross?"

"Yes."

"Go on, and be quick."

"I will, Mr. Wild."

"Tell me all, that I may know how to act."

"I was standing close to the railings of King Charles's statue, sheltering myself, as well as I could, from the rain, when I saw some one cross the open space and stand in the shadow of the statue."

"Go on, go on."

"I thought in a moment that it was an appointment of some kind, so I did not move an inch, but screened myself as close to the railings as I possibly could."

"Make haste."

"You said I was to tell you all, Mr. Wild."

"I know I did."

"I waited and listened, and presently I saw another figure come across the square, and I could have taken my davy that was Jack Sheppard."

"However, I did not move, and up he came to the statue railings, and the one that had got there first stepped forward and spoke to the second. I could not tell what the words were, because he spoke in a very low tone of voice, but I could tell by the tones who it was. It was Blueskin."

"Make haste."

"You needn't trouble, Mr. Wild, they are quite safe. However, I'll tell you more. I stopped quite still, for I thought if I moved they would take the alarm and be off; so I listened. They came back to the statue, and stood talking for a good while."

"And could you hear then what they said?"

"No, only a word here and there."

"And what were those words?"

"I can't recollect, Mr. Wild."

"Not recollect?"

"No. It was only a word here and a word there that I heard, and they didn't make no sense at all."

"Oh!"

"However, I kept quite still, determined not to move an inch till I had housed them. As it happened, I had not long to wait. One took hold of the other by the arm, and straight across the square they went, in the direction of Northumberland House."

"You followed."

"Of course I did. I never let them be out of my sight one moment, Mr. Wild. They went past Northumberland House, and turned down one of the streets leading to the river. I followed them still, but more cautiously than before, because the street was empty, and there was consequently all the more danger of their hearing me."

"What next?"

"At the bottom of this street, and built quite upon the river's side, is a thieves' ken, which I am sure, Mr. Wild, you must know very well."

"I do. Are they there?"

"Yes, they are inside. I watched them go in."

"But, while we have been talking here they may have left."

"I hardly think so, Mr. Wild. If they have, it don't matter."

"Why not?"

"I know a man who lives in the street, so I went to him, and got him to stand in front of the door and watch whether they came out, and if they did, to follow them

wherever they went, and on no account to lose sight of them."

"Very good, Stevens. You have acted most sensibly throughout this matter. You shall have an ample reward if you will come to my house in the morning."

"Shall I go with you now, Mr. Wild? I can show you the way."

"And you can speak to the man you have left on the watch."

"To be sure I can, sir."

"Then get up behind one of my men, and now, quick—forward!"

At the word the little troop put itself in motion.

Across Fleet Market—up the ascent of Fleet-street—and under Temple-bar they went.

Upon reaching the narrow turning by the side of Northumberland House, which led down to the river, the men, by Wild's orders, dismounted from their steeds.

Two were left in charge of them, and the remainder, headed by the thief-taker and Stevens, proceeded stealthily down it.

"That is the ken," said Stevens, presently, as he pointed to a faint light in the distance.

"Where is your man?"

"A little further on. I told him to keep out of sight. I dare say he is in one of the doorways."

The houses in this little narrow street were very ancient structures, and furnished with very curious porches over the doorways.

In old-fashioned country-towns others of a similar fashion may still be seen, like little houses projecting out, with a seat on each side.

Better hiding-places than these could not be wished, and, as Stevens had foretold, upon passing one of these he found his man.

Upon inquiry, he found that no two persons answering to the description of Jack and Blueskin had emerged from the ken.

So far, then, all promised well.

Jonathan Wild's next proceeding was to carefully surround the ken upon the three sides, where it was practicable, with his men.

The fourth side overlooked the river which was now almost at full tide.

It was not possible to post his men there.

Having taken all these precautions, the thief-taker proceeded to commence his attack upon the ken.

He knocked in the manner of the initiated, and the door was opened.

Then in a moment his men rushed in, overcoming all the resistance which the man who guarded the door could offer them.

The interior of the ken was well known to Wild.

It was about as celebrated a one as any in London, and he had made visits there before to-night.

He heard the alarm sounded.

His men were provided with torches, which they lighted, then drawing their swords, they hurried forward.

We have previously set down the temporizing speech which Wild made to the inmates of the ken when he requested them to give up the two persons of whom they were in search.

We know, also, how the speech was responded to by those members of the "Family" who were present, and having brought our narrative down to this point, and accounted for Wild's presence, which at first seemed rather remarkable, we will resume.

Finding that the only hope he had of obtaining his prisoners was by taking them at the sword's point, Jonathan waved his hanger round his head, and uttering a shout which was echoed by the men behind him, he sprang forward, and headed the attack.

But in return he was attacked with cool determination, and he found that he should have far more trouble than he had at first expected.

The "Family" was for the most part composed of strong and desperate men, well skilled in the use of warlike weapons.

Jonathan's janizaries were a long time making an impression on them.

But we will follow Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

It will be remembered that the former had caught hold of the latter and led him across the vault, when Wild effected his entrance.

CHAPTER CCIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ESCAPE JONATHAN WILD BY A HAIR'S BREADTH.

"NEVER heed him," said Blueskin, when Jack called his attention to their old enemy, and turned round. "This way; follow me quickly."

Jack obeyed; for of course he wished to save his life, if such a thing was possible.

Blueskin led him to a small closed door.

There were no fastenings to it visible, but Blueskin pressed upon it in a peculiar manner with his thumb, and it flew open.

They passed through instantly, and shut the door behind them.

They were now in absolute darkness; they had not even the torches which Jonathan's men carried to aid them.

"Put your hand against the wall, Jack," said Blueskin. "We are in a passage. Step forward carefully, for we shall come to some stairs presently."

"Going up or down?" asked Jack.

"Up."

"Should we be safe, do you think, without going any further?"

"No; Jonathan will be almost sure to find us."

"I can't hear much noise now."

"Nor can I."

The sound of the fighting, which had before sounded very plainly in their ears, now almost ceased.

"What do you make of that, Blue?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps Jonathan has changed his tactics."

"Likely enough."

"Ah! stop!"

"The stairs!"

"Yes."

"All right. Go up."

"How many?"

"Thirteen."

In the most profound darkness our friends ascended a flight of thirteen stone steps, which, either from the moisture of the contiguous river, or some other cause, were dangerously slippery with damp.

The top was, however, reached in safety, and here Blueskin paused a minute or two to listen.

But all was comparatively still. There was fighting going on somewhere, but it seemed to be below them.

"Where now?" asked Jack.

"There is a door here. Ah! we must be quick. Jonathan is upon us quicker than I thought he would be."

There was a war of voices and a crushing sound.

The door at the bottom of the steps, which fastened with a secret spring, was broken down.

Jonathan Wild was the first to dash through the opening.

He held a torch in his left hand, and the hanger, which he carried in the other, was dripping with blood.

He saw the stairs, and his eye travelled up them with the rapidity of thought.

He caught sight of two dusky figures at the top.

To do this—drop his hanger, draw a pistol from his belt, aim it and pull the trigger, were events that succeeded each other so quickly that no appreciable interval of time intervened between the first and the last.

The report of the pistol, which was of enormous size, sounded intensely loud in that confined space.

Wild did not wait to see what effect his shot had taken.

Mingling with the last reverberation of the explosion they heard his voice, crying—

"Follow! Follow! Up the steps! Quick! Quick! We shall have them yet!"

A small portion of Jonathan's band, who had succeeded in forcing a passage across the vault, where the others were still struggling, obeyed his commands, and darted up the slippery steps after him.

When our friends saw their invincible enemy so close upon their track, Blueskin opened a door, and, as soon as he and his companion had passed through, secured it as well as he was able.

They found themselves in a long passage.

"Here my knowledge of the place ends," said Blueskin, "and which way I am to turn I really do not know, and as there is no one here of whom we can inquire, we must trust to our luck, and rely upon that to guide us. If Jonathan was not so close behind us, we should be able to make an examination of the place, and see what had best be done. But it is no good to think about that now."

"Quite waste of time," said Jack. "Surely I must be bullet-proof, for that was the nearest touch I ever had. Look here!"

Jack pointed to a scratch along his left temple, from which the blood was slowly oozing.

One-eighth of an inch more and the wound would have been fatal.

"I did not know you were hit, Jack."

"Oh! it's nothing. Rather a close shave, that is all."

"Rather too close to be pleasant. Confound him, there he is at the other door! That will be down in a moment!"

While speaking, our friends had made their way hastily along the corridor in a right-hand direction, but when Blueskin spoke, Jonathan had reached the door which they had fastened, and struck it such a succession of heavy and violent blows, that its demolition was threatened every moment.

Then the end of the passage was reached.

There was no outlet to it.

On the left-hand side, however, there was a half-open door, which led into a room.

This offered them at least a chance of escape, so they rushed in.

Fortunately it was vacant.

Then Jonathan and his men burst into the passage.

The thief-taker was just in time to see the shadow of their forms pass through the doorway, and he was on their track at once.

Perspiration started from every pore in his body, and down his face and neck it ran in tiny streams.

Occasionally he would dash his hand across his eyes as he found the falling drops obscured his vision, but that was all he had to do.

Blueskin's first act when he entered the room was to lock the door.

A lock was the only fastening it had, and that was a very cracker affair.

The key was in it, however, and he turned it.

There was no time to seek for other securements.

"Is there any way out, Jack?" he asked.

"None, except the window."

"Curse it!"

He glanced round the chamber as he spoke.

There were signs about it which made it clear that it had only recently been occupied, and it would seem, too, that those who were last in the place had left it rather hurriedly.

Then he looked up at the window.

It was a large latticed casement, with two folding leaves.

"We must either stand here and fight Jonathan Wild and his crew, or jump through the window. Which shall it be?"

"Where will the window take you to?"

"I don't know, but I will soon see."

As he spoke, Blueskin pushed the table close under the window, and mounting upon it, looked out.

Or rather, he endeavoured to look out, but he found there was such a collection of dirt upon the panes that it was impossible.

He ran his hand up the middle, and felt for the fastener, which he undid, and then swung both leaves of the window open.

At this very moment Jonathan Wild, who had reached the door, and finding that it was only secured by a lock, placed one of his pistols against the keyhole, and blew the lock off at one blow.

"Quick!" said Jack. "He is here."

"All right," answered Blueskin from the window-sill. "On to the table, and through the window. There's the river Thames not above twelve feet beneath, so we shall get off, for I know you can swim. Here goes!"

Blueskin sprang out of the window before he had well finished speaking.

A heavy splash followed.

Jack obeyed his hastily-given instructions with great rapidity.

He mounted on to the table, and made a flying leap after his comrade.

But Jonathan was now fairly in the room, and he saw Jack about to spring.

His own pistols were all discharged, but he turned round swiftly, and took the one out of the hands of the man next behind him.

Then he fired it full at Jack.

But he was just a little too late.

The report of the pistol mingled with the splash which Jack made as he entered the water.

He felt bruised and blinded, and seemed to sink fathoms deep into the Thames.

Jonathan ran hastily to the window, and, jumping upon the table, seemed almost as though he was going to follow those he was pursuing, and take a flying leap into the Thames.

But a second thought seemed to come over him.

He waved his torch in the air, and cast the glimmer of its light upon the surface of the turbid river.

He placed, too, a whistle between his lips, and blew it shrilly, as a signal to those men he had set to surround and watch the house.

But this signal was hardly needed.

Already had they heard the two splashes which followed Jack and Blueskin's immersion in the Thames, and they jumped to the conclusion in a moment that their prey had taken to the water.

Lights were seen moving rapidly upon the river bank, and pistols were continually discharging.

"A boat! a boat!" yelled Wild, as he stood on the window-sill, and waved his torch round his head like a maniac. "A boat—a boat! Get a boat and row beneath this window, and I will drop into it."

His words were heard, and, after some delay, were responded to.

The boat was stopped just beneath the window, and Jonathan lowered himself into it.

He held by his hands to the window-sill, and then he had but a few inches to drop.

His first act was to seize a torch from one of the men, and make his way to the head of the little wherry, and take a careful look around him.

But nothing save the black shining water met his gaze.

There were no traces of either Jack or Blueskin, and though he rowed for a long time around the spot, and though he was aided by several other boats who put off to his assistance, he was unable to find anything that would serve as a clue.

It seemed as though they had dropped into the bosom of the river, and never risen again.

CHAPTER CCIV.

IN WHICH JONATHAN WILD REACHES HIS OWN HOUSE IN NEWGATE-STREET THOROUGHLY EXHAUSTED.

"BAFFLED once more by that devil's cub!" said Wik's, bitterly, when he found all his efforts to obtain a glimpse of his foes unavailing, and unwillingly had the boat's heat turned to the land. "I should swear they were drowned, only I feel confident that a drier death is decreed for both."

But this was but a sorry reflection to soothe Wild's disappointment.

To think that he should have taken such precautions.

To think that he should have felt so sure that he had his prey at length in his grasp.

To think that when he would freely have wagered any amount that they could not escape from him, that they should after all, in such an incomprehensible manner, slip through his fingers.

And yet they had done so.

Stevens, the officer, who thought he had managed things so cleverly, looked terribly chaffallen.

Silent and moody, Jonathan landed close to the thieves' ken.

Here he, however, left the spot, he took one long lingering look at the river, in the hope that he should, perhaps, catch a glimpse of the forms of those he was so anxious to see.

But no, the muddy waters fell plash, plash, against the

wooden piles, which had been driven into the ground to prevent the encroachment of the water, and that was all.

The dusky outlines of one or two boats at anchor could be seen, but not a trace of Blueskin or Jack Sheppard.

In anything but an amiable frame of mind, he summoned his men around him, and going to the top of the street, mounted his horse, and bent his steps towards Newgate-street.

The fact was, that what with his disappointment, and the fatigue which the weakness from his wound produced, Jonathan Wild was dead beat.

The reader must not forget that he has made some rather incredible exertions considering the debilitated state of his body.

Indeed, it would not be too much to say that no other man save Jonathan Wild could have supported himself at all under such circumstances.

At a slow pace he led the way towards Newgate-street.

When he once more arrived at his door, the first faint flush of dawn from the new day was climbing up into the sky above the roof-tops.

But he scarcely noticed this.

He dismounted.

The door was thrown open by Quilt Arnold, who had been left in charge of the premises during the thief-taker's absence.

Jonathan staggered up the steps.

Quilt said something to him.

He was just aware of that much, but what was the purport of his speech he had not the remotest idea, and he felt too faint and languid to inquire.

The stairs were straight before him, and mechanically he directed his steps towards them.

Then arriving at the foot, he grasped the balusters with one hand, and slowly ascended step by step.

Up to the first floor he went, and into one of the rooms which were upon it.

There was a bed which fitted into a little recess, and towards this he mechanically staggered, and threw himself at full length upon it.

Scarcely had he done so than he fell into a profound sleep—sleep so deep that no ordinary sound or noise would awake him from it.

Let not any one feel surprised that sleep should have come upon him so suddenly. He was almost asleep when he came up the stairs.

Nature was now having her due. Like a stern creditor, who had for a long time been set aside, she asserted her rights at last, and had them.

In his half-conscious state, Jonathan did not notice a face that peered over the balusters above, and watched his devious course across the landing.

Nor did he hear the steps of the person who descended from the upper part of the house and stole into the bedroom after him.

The dawn became more and more manifest.

The different objects in the room were being revealed by the slate-coloured light which fell upon them.

The person who glided into the room, upon reaching the bedside, folded his arms and looked down upon the countenance of the sleeping thief-taker.

That person was Steggs, who still kept his watch at the door of the poor persecuted heiress.

Eagerly and anxiously had he watched for Jonathan's return, and now he came at last.

Came, too, without bringing with him those of whom he had set out in pursuit.

"He sleeps," said Steggs, in a strange, hoarse whisper; "he is completely overcome. He is helpless, and at my mercy. What shall I do? Shall I slay him as he sleeps? One blow, and then the persecutions of Edgworth Bess and Jack Sheppard will be over. I think I will do it. Such a chance may never occur again."

Steggs ceased.

He felt in his pocket and produced a knife, which he opened, and carefully felt the point.

But even at that moment a second thought swept through his mind, and the arm which he had raised in an attitude to strike dropped powerless by his side.

Jonathan Wild knew it not—never did know it—but that night he had the narrowest escape of his life that ever he had during the whole of his vicissitudinous career.

Under circumstances of strong excitement persons will

frequently, when they are alone, utter their thoughts aloud.

Steggs did in the present instance.

"No—no," he said; "that were indeed a poor revenge. I will not slay him now, though I could easily do so. I will save him—not from any pity that I have for him, but because he shall live longer, in order that my triumph shall be greater. I must be patient, and wait until he has achieved the height of his ambition—until all those daring schemes which he has projected are consummated. Then will be my time. He shall be cast down from the pinnacle of his greatness."

Steggs paused, and restored his knife to his pocket.

Brighter and brighter grew the new coming day, but the thief-taker still slept that heavy and lethargic sleep into which he had fallen.

Steggs glided away from the bedside, noiselessly, and then ascended the stairs.

A chair was provided for him in which to sit, but he passed it by, and made his way direct to the chamber in the occupation of poor Edgworth Bess.

He tapped lightly with his finger-ends upon the panel, and from the quickness with which his appeal was answered, it would seem as though the fair prisoner had been anxiously expecting him.

With the skeleton key which he had taken from Mary Milliner he opened the door and went in.

Edgworth Bess was wonderfully recovered.

Indeed, with the exception of a slight weakness, she might almost be said to have entirely recovered from the hard usage she had received.

She was up and dressed, and stood before Steggs with her hands clasped, looking him beseechingly in the face, like one who fully expected to be made the recipient of bad news.

Her apparel was ragged and torn, for it had been as roughly used as herself, and showed the effects of it, but it could not mar the beauty of her face, nor the grace of her symmetrical form.

"Speak—speak," she cried. "That was Jonathan I heard return, was it not? He has returned from his search after Jack Sheppard."

"Calm yourself," said Steggs, "you have nothing to be alarmed at. Jonathan has returned, and now lies, as I take it, in a drunken slumber, in one of the rooms below. He has only just returned, and has brought no prisoners with him."

"Thank heaven for that. Then Jack and Blueskin have once more eluded him. Oh! there is hope in that, great hope."

"There is, indeed," said Steggs. "A little patience now, and then doubtless all will be well. I shall see Blueskin soon, and from him I shall learn further particulars, and more especially the plan of action which it is his intention to adopt."

Ah! yes. For my own part I cannot see my way out of the perilous circumstances with which I am surrounded, but then they may. They are stronger-minded than I am."

"I am glad you have such a feeling of reliance upon them, since it will make their proceedings all the easier."

"Oh! if I could but leave this hateful place; if I could but be once more with them, my sufferings would not seem half so great."

"Cheer up. You may see them even sooner than you expect."

"It seems ages since I saw them last."

"It is a long time; and now let me leave you. I wish I could make you feel entirely at your ease. Believe me, while I have the guard of your chamber, no harm will happen to you. If Jonathan attempts to use any violence towards you, he dies. I do not fancy, however, that just at present you have anything to fear from him. Still, if I was found here in conversation with you, all would be ruined."

"All would, indeed. Go now at once; for though I am loath to send you away, still I feel that you have stayed here quite as long as prudence would allow."

Steggs bowed, as though he quite concurred with this opinion, and then he took his leave.

He resumed his old seat upon the chair, and leaning his head upon his hands, he busied himself in planning the means he should use to completely overthrow Jonathan Wild.

To the proceedings of this last-named individual we will now return.

The fierce beams of a noonday sun, falling directly upon his eyes, awoke him.

They did not have that effect immediately, but gradually.

When the thief-taker did open his eyes, there came such a flood of light upon them that he felt almost blinded.

That feeling, however, soon passed away.

But his head was racked with such terrible pains that he knew not what to do.

He felt that if they continued long he must inevitably go mad.

Scarcely conscious, he rose from the bed upon which he had fallen, dressed just as he was, and sitting down upon the side of it, he pressed his temples with his hands, and looked about him.

On the opposite side was a large pitcher full of water.

The neck was large, and probably the whole quantity of water contained in it was nothing under two gallons.

With a cry, such as some parched traveller upon the burning deserts of Arabia might give utterance to upon seeing a pool of water before him, Jonathan Wild sprang across the room to this pitcher.

He knelt down.

Then plunged his burning, aching head into the pitcher, until it was stopped from going any further by his shoulders pressing against the brim.

CHAPTER CCV.

LORD DONMULL HAS A CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN WILD, AND THE LATTER EXHIBITS SOME OF HIS OLD TREACHERY.

The gush of cold water was intensely delightful.

The burning and the pain which had before been so excruciating, vanished as if by magic.

But want of breath soon compelled him to withdraw his head.

He felt incomparably better, and so soon as he had inflated his lungs, he plunged his head in again with a still keener appreciation of the delight which it afforded him.

And so he continued this process time after time, until in the end he felt something like himself.

His next proceeding was to attend to his dress, which was rather disordered.

Jonathan Wild, however, was not the man to expend much time upon his toilette.

Upon emerging from his room, which he did with a scowl upon his face, he crossed the landing, and ascended the stairs.

Steggs was at his post.

"Is all well?" asked the thief-taker.

"All, Mr. Wild," replied Steggs. "I have not moved from my post."

"Good! Keep a good watch upon her, and the moment anything of an unusual character occurs, communicate with me."

"You may depend upon me, Mr. Wild."

"So far you have performed your duty most satisfactorily. You are sure all is well?"

"All, Mr. Wild."

"Then I will go down now. It is late, and I have business to attend to. But let me again tell you that if you will continue to serve me faithfully, your reward shall be most ample."

Steggs protested his thanks.

Jonathan descended the stairs.

Upon gaining the hall on the ground-floor, he saw Quilt Arnold in the passage.

That worthy caught sight of the thief-taker at that moment, and he came towards him as though he had some important message to deliver.

"What is it, Quilt?"

"A gentleman has been waiting to see you, Mr. Wild, ever since the first thing this morning."

"Ha! Who is he?"

"He gave me this card, which he said would be sufficient."

There was no name on the card, but simply a crest.

It was sufficient, for Jonathan recognised it instantly.

It was the crest belonging to the Donnull family.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"In No. 2."

"Bring him up to my room."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan turned round, and ascended the stairs again.

He entered that room so familiar to the reader, in which he sat when Jack Sheppard was first introduced to him. He had just time to seat himself when Quilt tapped at the door.

Jonathan summoned to his face a stern expression, for it was his intention to deal decisively with his lordship.

He endeavoured to impart something of his old fierceness to his voice as he said, "Come in!"

The door was opened, and Lord Donnull entered, ushered in by Quilt, who closed the door behind him and retired.

It is a long time since we have seen his lordship.

The last occasion was when Jonathan persuaded him to seek change of scene as a relief to his mind.

It will not be forgotten, too, that on the occasion of that last interview, Lord Donnull was willing to seek out Edgeworth Bess, and make all the reparation that lay in his power by acknowledging what he had done, placing her in possession of her estates, and trusting to her kindness not to expose his wrong doings.

But this was a state of things that was by no means in accordance with Wild's wishes.

Rather anxiously, then, he gave a furtive glance into the countenance of his lordship, in order to gather by its expression whether his sentiments had undergone a change.

He thought they had.

He rose from his seat as his lordship entered, and motioned him to take a chair.

"Good morning, my lord," he said.

"Good morning, Mr. Wild."

"It is some time since we met. Have you taken my advice?"

"I have, Mr. Wild. I have."

"And did you find my advice was good?"

"Yes—yes, but I cannot drown thought. I have tried to do it in every imaginable way, but vainly—vainly. The thing is an impossibility."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, my lord."

"Look here, Wild. You know the business which has brought me here as well as I know it myself."

"Indeed I do not."

"Where—where is the girl?"

"The girl?"

"Yes, Elizabeth. Is she in your power?"

"Trouble yourself no further about her."

"Is she dead?"

"I say, do not trouble yourself any further about her."

"But I cannot help doing so—I cannot help doing so. While she lives I cannot enjoy that which I have; but if—if she was no more—then I should feel that I was sure."

"My lord," said Jonathan.

"What?"

"Will you listen to me?"

"What do you wish to say?"

"That which concerns you intimately."

"Speak on, then."

"You are nervous and excited. That is all which ails you. You should keep your hand firm and your head cool, like I do."

"I wish I was more like you. But that is useless. Now, once for all, and all for once, tell me whether the girl is in your power."

"Why do you wish to know?"

"Never mind."

"Will you not tell me?"

"Not till afterwards."

"Well, then, she is in my power."

"I thought so—I thought so."

"And tell me."

"Wild I must see her."

"This is folly, my lord."

"It may be, but see her I will, I am determined."

A dark threatening look came from the eyes of Lord Donnull as he spoke.

"My lord."

"Let me see the girl!"

"First listen to me a moment. My lord, you put this affair into my hand, did you not?"

"I undertook to bring it to a proper conclusion."

"I know you did."

"Is it too much, then, to ask you to allow things to remain just as they are at present, and not to interfere with me in any way. If it is any satisfaction to you, I will give you my word that you shall have no more trouble with her. Let me persuade you to go forth into the world and to banish all recollection of her from your mind. Will you do this?"

"You have urged this before."

"I know I have; but you have not complied with my suggestions. There are many who would envy the chance which you have got of enjoying yourself as long as you live; and after that, what matters!"

Lord Donnull shuddered.

"I wish I could be as you say; but when I came here this morning it was with the firm resolution of demanding the girl from you."

"Tush—tush! my lord; she is in safe keeping—I will answer for that—safer keeping than if she were dead; for then her bones would rise up against you. You have no reason to be afraid. Dismiss from your mind all feelings of doubt. All is well. I will answer for the girl with my life."

"I can't tell how it is, Wild, but I feel no enjoyment in my possessions. Mine is truly a wretched life."

"Tut—tut! I would willingly change with you; and now, my lord, there is a little matter which, although you have not alluded to it, I hope has not slipped your memory."

"To what do you allude?"

"You employed me in this business, and I have devoted a great deal of time to it, to the exclusion of my own affairs, which were to me of paramount importance. I have completely succeeded in doing all that I intended to do, and now I look for my reward."

"You shall have it, Wild."

"I thought your lordship would make that reply, and I rejoice to hear it; but be under no apprehension, I do not want it now. Any time will do; and as to the amount of it, why that I leave entirely to yourself."

"You shall have no reason to be dissatisfied with the amount. But, Mr. Wild, you see before you a deeply repentant man. I have done wrong, and I care not who knows it; and I would fain do justice while it remains in my power."

Jonathan frowned.

Were his schemes to be thwarted by the pusillanimity of one of his tools?

Never.

But if he did not adopt some powerful means of preventing it, he certainly would be ruined.

A thought struck him.

"My lord?"

"Yes."

"You are still in the same mind?"

"I am."

"And you would wish to place your niece in possession of her fortune?"

"Most gladly."

"Come with me, then, and I will take you to her. In my desire to see yourself righted, I have tried to persuade you to leave things to me, because then they would turn out most to your interest. But you think differently. So be it. Will it please you to come with me?"

"Certainly I will," said Lord Donnull, rising with alacrity from his scat.

"Come this way, then. You can, if you think proper, take hold of my arm."

"Is she in this house?"

"Yes."

"Then we have not far to go?"

"Oh! no. This way, if you please. Downstairs."

Lord Donnull took hold of the thief-taker's arm, and the two descended the staircase.

Upon reaching the ground, Jonathan turned and led his lordship in the direction of the grating which led to the cells.

The man who was on guard there, at a sign from Wild, unlocked the ponderous lock, and threw it open.

"Is it through here, Mr. Wild?" asked Lord Donnull. "Yes, yes. Down the steps. Take care, or you will slip."

"I did; but"—
 "But this seems like a prison," remarked his lordship, as he glanced at the stone walls.
 "It certainly has that appearance," said Wild; "but it is all the safer for that."

CHAPTER CCV.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COMMENCE THEIR ADVENTURES IN SEARCH OF MONEY IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT THEIR SCHEMES.

THAT Jonathan Wild meditates some treachery towards Lord Donnull the readers must feel certain, because, as they are well aware, it was not in those gloomy dungeons beneath his house that Edgworth Bess was to be found.

But leaving them upon their errand, we will return to Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

When the former reached the water, being an excellent swimmer, he quickly rose to the surface, and turned his face towards land, to be on the look-out for his companion.

He saw him fall, and swam towards the spot.

But Jack rose at some little distance.

He reached him, however, in less than half-a-dozen strokes, and the first sounds almost of which Jack was conscious, were those of his comrade's voice.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"No."

"Follow me, then. Swim for your life, or Jonathan will have us, after all!"

"Where shall you go?"

This was a pertinent question, but it was one which Blueskin was not able to give a direct answer to.

In fact, the leap into the Thames had been taken suddenly, and without knowing what he should do, so that he now found himself completely at a loss.

But this, certainly, was no time for deliberation now.

Jack noticed his comrade's silence, and guessed in a moment the reason of it.

"Let us swim to shore, Blue," he said. "If we go down the river, Jonathan is sure to overtake us. Let us get back to shore."

"A good idea," said Blueskin. "We will land close to the ken."

Accordingly, they swam back to the shore, just at the time Jonathan was lowering himself into the boat.

For some distance all along the river side, it was fenced in with wooden palisades, which had been driven deeply into the soft ooze at the bottom of the river.

At low tide they could not possibly have reached the top of these, because there the bed of the river was exposed, and would have swallowed them up like a bog.

But being high tide they were, after one or two attempts, able to clutch the top edge of the palings with their fingers.

Here they remained a little while, not daring to move, for fear that if they did, some sound would reach the ears of Wild, and show him where they were.

With what eagerness they watched their enemies' actions can readily be guessed.

The light of the torches which they carried made their position continually apparent.

Once they had a narrow escape of discovery.

The whole of their attention was rivetted upon Wild in the boat, and they gave no thought of those who had been left to search along the banks.

A party carrying torches suddenly appeared, and they had only just time to release their hold upon the palings and duck their heads beneath the water, when the glaring light was thrown upon the very spot they had so recently occupied.

Of course there was now no trace of them to be seen, and having satisfied themselves, the janizaries passed on, having missed their prey by a hair's-breadth.

They stayed, however, long enough to try the endurance of our friends to the utmost, for they were almost dead for want of air.

They then resumed their grasp upon the palings, and judging this to be a favourable opportunity, they drew themselves up and over.

Right glad were they to find themselves once more upon dry ground, and they shook the water from their apparel, and felt after all but little the worse for their adventures.

Jonathan's boat was far out in the stream.

The men were dispersed along the banks.

Blueskin gave one glance at the objects wherewith he was surrounded, and then he led Jack forward with confidence, for he knew exactly whereabouts he was.

In a short time they emerged into the Strand, close to the spot where Jonathan's horses were waiting.

Jack proposed that they should steal a couple of them and make off, but Blueskin overruled him.

"It will be by far too dangerous," he said. "I want to get Jonathan off our track if I possibly can for a little while, so as to allow us time to breathe, and if we take those cattle, he will be after us like a shot. No, Jack, it won't do, though I should like to spite him, nevertheless, but we shall have plenty of chances of doing so by-and-by."

"Where are we bound to, now?"

"We ought to change our clothes."

"So we ought; but where is there a place?"

"I think I can find you one in Seven-dials."

"All right."

The distance from Charing-cross to Seven-dials is not very great, and the two friends made their way towards it at full speed.

In Little Earl-street, Blueskin stopped before a house, which differed from those adjoining in having no shop window.

Indeed, it looked like a private house.

At that hour the street was quite empty.

The house before which they stopped, like the others, presented no signs of habitation.

But Blueskin rang a bell, the handle of which was concealed in the door-post, and waited patiently a minute or two for admission.

"What place is this, Blue?"

"A fence."

"Yes; I know the man who keeps it."

"Is he to be trusted?"

"Fully."

"That is all right."

"You have only to tell him you are an enemy of Jonathan Wild's."

"Oh! indeed! Why?"

"Jonathan had his only son executed about three years ago, and ever since that he has sworn to have his revenge upon him."

"And he is friends with whosoever is an enemy to Wild!"

"Yes."

"Then we shall be bosom friends, I'll swear."

At this moment the door was opened, and a little old man appeared upon the threshold.

He held a thin candle, or rather rushlight in his hand, and with his other hand he shaded it from the draught.

This caused nearly the whole of the light to fall upon his shrivelled countenance, which it lighted up with a remarkable distinctness.

The moment he made his appearance, Blueskin uttered some words in a rapid tone of voice, in a language which Jack did not understand.

But to the old man they appeared perfectly comprehensible, for his face brightened, and he stood aside, and held open the door in order to allow them to enter.

Blueskin stepped over the threshold, and Jack followed him unhesitatingly.

They halted, however, while the door was fastened, and then the old man preceded them along a passage, which terminated in a small and tolerably well-furnished apartment.

There was a large fire burning in the grate, and the atmosphere within it was most insufferably hot.

But our friends were rather glad of this than otherwise, for walking in their wet garments had chilled them.

"And what do you want with Tumposki?" asked the old man, as he set the rushlight down upon the table. "Speak! The poor Jew is always willing to listen to your commands."

"Poor Jew!" said Blueskin. "Stuff—you know you are about the richest man in your tribe."

"I? Oh!—oh! Ha!—ha! Very good. I like that. Richest man in the tribe. Ha!—ha!"

"Well, never mind your riches, old man. Do you the state we are in?"



[BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ATTACK THE TRAVELLER ON HAMSTEAD-HEATH.]

"Yes—yes."

"We have been pursued, and all but captured, by Jonathan Wild."

Jack Sheppard looked closely into the old Jew's shrivelled countenance as Blueskin uttered the name of the thief-taker, in order to see the effect which it produced upon it.

A scowling frown immediately contracted his brows, and his small black eyes glittered brilliantly beneath his jet-black eyebrows.

"Jonathan Wild!" he cried, in a screaming voice. "Jonathan Wild! Murderer! Villain! Perjured monster! But I will have his blood! I have sworn that I will have his blood, and, by the God of Israel, I will keep my oath! Curses upon his name! I spit upon it!"

The old Jew worked himself up into a state of absolute frenzy while uttering these few words, and the whole of his body participated in his excitement.

"I have sworn the same oath," said Blueskin, "and I will surely keep it, even if I sacrifice my own life in taking his."

"And I the same," said Jack, "for he had my father hung at Tyburn."

"And my son. We are destined to be good friends, I see. Give me your hand. You hate him because he has deprived you of a father—I because he has deprived me of a son."

"We are all three against him, and his overthrow is certain."

"And immediate," said the Jew, his eyes still glittering with excitement.

"No, not immediate."

"Why not?"

"There are certain things to be done—certain plans to be brought to a successful issue—before he can be destroyed. But he lives only at our pleasure."

"Exactly so," said Jack. "I have taken an oath not only that I would compass his death, but that I would bring him to the gallows, at Tyburn. And I will do it, too. He has sworn the same thing of me, and we shall see who keeps his oath best."

"And now, Tumposki, we want your assistance. I know you will give it us, will you not?"

"What is it?"

"That you shall know presently; but, first, can not you find us with a bed, and have our clothing dried? We are most uncomfortable, and are sadly in want of rest. Will you oblige us? We will tell you our plans afterwards."

"Yes; come with me. I can take you to a place where you will be perfectly safe and secure from all discovery. You, Mr. Blake, I know; but what is the name of this young man who is with you?"

"Sheppard."

"Jack Sheppard?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. I am glad to have so bitter a foe of Jonathan Wild's beneath my roof."

CHAPTER CCVII.

AARON TUMPOSKI, THE JEW, AFFORDS BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD MATERIAL AID.

THERE was upon the table in the centre of the room a curiously-fashioned bell, and as he uttered the words which concluded the last chapter, the old Jew, who rejoiced in the rather peculiar name of Tumposki, rang it sharply.

The summons was answered by a woman, who looked as old and as shrivelled-up as himself.

"Ruth," he said, "take these two gentlemen upstairs, and show them into a bedroom. They are going to sleep here for a few hours. You will also dry their clothes."

"This way, if you please," said the old woman named Ruth. "You will not require a light—it is already day-break."

"At sunset, Aaron," said Blueskin to the old Jew, "we will descend, and talk over this business, which doubtless will turn out to your profit in more ways than one."

So saying, he followed Jack and the old woman upstairs into a comfortably furnished apartment, fitted up in an oriental fashion, as a bedroom.

Here she left them, having first thrown open the shutters, and allowed the early morning's light to enter.

Both Blueskin and Sheppard were very much fatigued, and no wonder, for the exertions they had been called upon to make were enough to make them.

The shelter they had so opportunely found was most welcome, and besides which, they had the delightful feeling that they were perfectly secure.

They occupied themselves for some time in talking over the past and speculating upon the future, but at length they dropped off into a sound slumber.

How long this sleep would have lasted it is hard to say, but at sunset the old Jew tapped at the door, and awoke them.

Their clothes were well brushed, and clean, and dry, so hastily putting them on, they descended.

They found the old Jew seated in the same apartment as he was on the preceding evening.

On the table, however, was spread a substantial and tempting repast, to which he invited them to sit down and do justice to.

Our friends awoke hungry after their long sleep, and the viands spread out before them seemed appetizing in the extreme, so they at once availed themselves of the Jew's invitation.

After this meal was despatched, they drew up to the fire and commenced the conversation.

"Aaron," said Blueskin, "Jack Sheppard and myself have certain plans which we are resolved to carry out, but we cannot do so, mind you, until we possess a tolerably large sum of money."

The Jew nodded.

"To obtain this sum of money will be our first care, and I daresay you know how we shall procure it."

"Crack a crib?"

"No, by high toby."

"Well, well?"

"We shall run a great risk, of course, for the officers are out searching for us in every direction, but we do not mind that."

"Certainly not; but what do you want with me?"

"Simply this: we are quite unprovided with the necessities requisite for our enterprise, but it is in your power to supply us with them. Will you do so?"

The Jew was silent for a moment, and then, as if ashamed of his hesitation, which was caused solely by his natural cupidity, he said—

"I will, and willingly; but what shall you do with your swag?"

"Bring it to you, of course, my dear Aaron, and we shall trust to you to give us a fair and liberal price for it, for the sooner we can obtain the sum of money we require, the better it will be for us."

"Very good. You can trust me. Now, when do you intend to start upon your expedition?"

"In about two hours' time."

"So soon?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know, only I should have thought it would have been most prudent to have waited a little while, so that the officers should have abated their vigilance somewhat."

"Pho! pho! We are more likely to succeed to-night than any other; besides, I tell you we are pushed for time, and wish to amass a certain sum as speedily as possible."

"Do so, with all my heart."

"Well, then, I hope we understand each other?"

"Perfectly."

"That is all right, then."

"What next?"

"Nothing, except that we shall want you to equip us."

"What with?"

"We are short of everything."

"Oh!"

"You know what is required quite as well as we could tell you. Horses, pistols, and ammunition are the most important."

"Of course they are. You shall have them. I will leave you here, if you like, while I go out to see about them myself. I never like trusting these matters to another."

"Much the best plan."

"I have always found it so."

"Where shall you get the horses?"

"I don't know yet."

"Well, don't go to the stables in Long-acre, for I fancy, somehow, the people there are in league with Jonathan Wild."

"Thanks for that caution. I should very likely have gone there."

"But you will not now?"

"Certainly not, as there is a doubt in the matter."

With these words, the old Jew took a hat and cloak off a peg, and putting them on, sallied forth upon his errand.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, Jack said—

"Do you know much of this Jew?"

"Not much."

"No more than you have told me, I suppose."

"No. Why do you ask the question?"

"Do you think he is to be trusted?"

"Yes."

"All right."

"What makes you suspicious?"

"He seems avaricious."

"All Jews are."

"Therefore I should not feel surprised"—

"What?"

"If he was to sell us to our enemies."

"No, Jack, I don't think that."

"Why not?"

"I grant you, that to a Jew money is almost everything, but there is one passion which will always make avariciousness succumb."

"And what is that?"

"Hatred, and the determination to be revenged."

"I think I understand you."

"You do him an injustice, I am sure you do. If he intended to betray us he has had plenty of chance of doing so ere now, and you may rely upon it he would have embraced the earliest opportunity."

"So he would."

"Trust him, Jack. He will be of great service to us in more ways than one."

"He could be if he was faithful."
 "Do not offend him by showing anything like distrust. If all goes as I fancy it will, we shall be able to make sure of a safe refuge and a ready market for whatever booty we may take."

"I see all that, but it would be vexatious to be betrayed." "So it would, and he should pay for his treachery with his life. It should never advantage him any."

"That it should not."
 "There is no harm, however, in our being upon our guard—indeed, it is no more than we ought to be; but do not let him see that you are suspicious."

"All right."
 "He will be back directly, I daresay. Hark! I can hear some one now."

There was a faint tinkling of a bell somewhere, and then a moment after the Jew returned.

Jack looked narrowly into his countenance, but he could see there no traces of double-dealing.

He felt more satisfied.
 "I have succeeded beyond my expectation. As I dare say you know, I have within this house everything that you require, with the exception of the horses."

"I guessed as much."

"And you guessed rightly. Precisely at half-past nine two horses will be in waiting for you at the corner of Tottenham Court-road."

"Good."

"They are first-rate animals, sound of wind and limb, and of extraordinary fleetness; so that, if you are pursued, you will be able to show your foes a clean pair of heels."

"Are the holsters provided with pistols?"

"Yes; I have not forgotten that."

"Very good; then where are pistols for our pockets, and ammunition to reload them?"

"You shall have them at once."

As he spoke, the Jew went to a kind of cabinet, which stood in a recess in one corner of the room, and opened the two folding-doors.

A number of small drawers were disclosed, each one having a label, upon which a single word was written in Hebrew.

One of these drawers he took out, and put down upon the table.

It contained several small beautifully-made pistols.

He gave four each to our friends.

Then restoring the drawer to its place, he pulled forth another, which contained shot and powder flasks.

"Will you have masks?" he inquired, when they were supplied with these.

"You can give us two crape ones; we will put them in our pockets; they may, perhaps, be useful."

"Very good. Is there anything more?"

"I think not. What is the time?"

"Nearly a quarter-past nine."

"It is time we started, then?"

"It is. You will find a boy holding the horses, and you have to pronounce to him clearly and distinctly the word 'Samech,' and he will deliver them up to you."

"All right. We will not forget."

CHAPTER CCVIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD SET OUT FOR HAMPSTEAD HEATH, AND HAVE SOME SERIOUS TALK RESPECTING THEIR AFFAIRS UPON THE WAY.

The night was profoundly dark, and Jack and Blueskin, as they stood upon the threshold of the Jew's house in Little Earl-street, looked up at the sky with feelings of the utmost satisfaction.

The night was one most admirably suited to the enterprise they had in hand.

The stars twinkled in the sky overhead, but there was no moon.

After exchanging a few parting words with the Jew, our two friends made their way, with a quick step, in the direction mentioned.

The hearts of both were bold and light, and Blueskin said—

"Have you found any grounds for suspicion yet?"

"None."

"And I do not think you will. So long, in fact, as you keep faith with him he will keep faith with you, but no longer."

"He will keep faith for ever, then. But I am not to tell the truth, altogether satisfied though I soon shall be."

"What do you mean?"

"If I find the horses as he has told us, and if we ride away in safety I shall be satisfied. We may even now be walking to our capture."

"You are full of strange thoughts to-night, Jack."

"Do you think so?"

"I do, indeed."

"I do not like Jews."

"That is a very common thing. I do not, for instance, but I have faith in this one."

"So much the better. My doubts will soon be either put at rest or else confirmed."

"That is very true, for here we are."

They emerged into High-street, St. Giles's, close to the corner of Tottenham Court-road.

This now busy part was quite dark and deserted. It was at that time not the centre of a busy city, but a country cross-road.

The Oxford-road had gardens on either side, and the same may be said of the Tottenham Court-road, except that a few houses were here and there built upon it.

On reaching the corner, our two friends strained their eyes in a vain endeavour to pierce the obscurity around them.

No signs whatever of the two horses could be seen, and Blueskin felt the doubts to which his companion had given utterance rise up in his mind.

He said nothing, however, but crossed over to the particular corner which the Jew had indicated.

Just as they reached it, they heard the clock in the belfry of St. Giles's Church chime the half-hour, and ere the reverberations of the last stroke had died away, there seemed to grow out of the darkness surrounding them, the dusky figures of two horses.

In a moment Blueskin pronounced the word the old Jew had enjoined, and it was immediately responded to by the approach of a boy, who held two horses by the bridle, walking between them.

"All right," said the boy. "It is just the half-hour."

"It is," replied Blueskin. "You are punctual. Here is half-a-crown for you."

"Thank you, sir."

Blueskin and Sheppard mounted.

"What time shall you come back?" asked the boy.

"Why?"

"I am going to meet you."

"Where?"

"Here."

"But I have no idea when we shall return."

"Will it be before daybreak, sir?"

"Yes, certainly; but not much before."

"All right, sir. I will be here. If you don't see me, whistle three times. I shall be close at hand."

"Enough. Are you right, Jack?"

"Quite right."

"Off we go, then."

At a gentle trot, and yet one that got over the ground quickly, our two friends made their way up the Tottenham Court-road, in the direction of Hampstead-heath.

Nothing was said for some moments.

Jack Sheppard appeared to be plunged in a profound reverie.

At length Blueskin broke the silence, which to him was irksome, by saying—

"What are you thinking about, Jack?"

He had to repeat his question before his comrade heard or understood it.

"I was thinking about our expedition, Blue."

"What about it?"

"I can hardly tell you."

"Yet you seemed very deep in thought."

"I was, for I was trying to review my position."

"What, then?"

"I was thinking about Edgworth Bea."

"I could have sworn that."

"Could you?"

"I could."

"Why?"

"Jack, listen to me."

"With all my heart."

"I have many a time been going to say this to you,

but, somehow or other, I have always hesitated to do so."

"What is it?"

"This. We always speak of her and call her by the familiar name of Edgworth Bess, but you know as well as I do that that is not her title."

"I do know it. I wish it was!"

"No doubt—no doubt. Well, Jack, I like to call and think about her by that name, and so we will say nothing about that."

"What is it you do want to say?"

"In plain words, Jack, simply this: you love her?"

"I confess it."

"It is not necessary. I have seen it from the first. The circumstances under which you met with her are singular and romantic enough, but still, knowing as you do who she is, you must be aware that it would be dishonourable upon your part to show her the love you bear her."

"Blueskin, my friend, I like you all the better for that speech. Believe me, I have never once forgotten who she is and what I am. There is no need for you to tell me that there is an impassable gulf between us. I know it well enough already."

"I am glad to hear it, both for your sake and her own. As you say, there is indeed an impassable gulf between you. You could never cross it and become what she is, and surely you would not have her sink down to your level?"

"Never!"

"I thought not."

"Blueskin, my friend, I love her! I acknowledge it to you. I care not who knows it. But I do love, and always shall love her. Who could help doing so? But though I love her, that is no reason why I should tell her so, or seek to win her love in return. I can worship her at a distance, without once entertaining the thought that she could be mine."

"Jack, if you will take my advice, you will try your best to banish such a feeling from your heart. It will only be productive of unhappiness in the future."

"No—no! That is the only thing that makes life seem pleasant and endurable. Were I to discard that dream, I should be the most miserable being on the face of the earth. No, Blueskin, I cannot do that!"

"Then I am sorry to hear it."

"Why?"

"I can see mischief and misfortune in the future that will arise from it."

"Not by my causing."

"I fear it will follow."

"You need not be afraid. I have her happiness too much at heart. Curses on the villain, Wild. Were it not for him, our plan of operations would be simple and easy enough."

"You are right there; but there is one consolation, his career cannot last much longer—the sum of his iniquity is almost reached."

"I should have thought it had been reached long since. He has committed more crimes than twenty men."

"The day of reckoning is not far distant, Jack, but we have wandered away from what we were saying."

"We have, but it is not necessary to return to it. I fully understand and know all you would say to me, take my word for it."

"I will."

"That is enough. But surely you cannot have thought that I should be so base as to take advantage of her in such a way. No. Such a course would be worthy only of a villain like Jonathan Wild."

"But now, Jack, look here. Suppose we should succeed in restoring Edgworth Bess to her title and estates."

"Suppose? I have determined upon it."

"Well—well. Let that pass. Supposing we should succeed, and that any circumstances afterwards arose, such as your receiving a pardon, for instance, do you think you would be justified in making her your wife?"

Jack hesitated, and was finally silent.

"I understand your silence, Jack. You would be tempted. Think a little. There is a world—society—in which Edgworth Bess would have to move to maintain her position. Now, do you for a moment imagine that that society would tolerate and recognise you? No. You

would be accused of having made use of your opportunity to entrap the affections of the heiress, and you would drag her down to the same level as yourself."

Jack was still silent.

Blueskin did not attempt to interrupt him further, but let what he had just said sink deeply into his mind. He judged the lesson necessary, and it was not given a moment too soon.

At length Jack spoke, and when he did his voice was tinged with a sadness and seriousness which he could not disguise.

"Blueskin," he said, "you have opened my eyes. I thank you for it. If you will believe me, I desire but one thing, and that is her welfare and happiness. I will try to banish the feeling of love from my heart; but rest assured, let it be how it may, I will never take advantage of her in any way."

"I can take your word, I know, Jack."

"You can."

"You are all right, after all. And I only hope that we shall be fortunate enough to meet with good luck, and have a profitable night's work."

"Stop a moment, Blue," said Jack. "That reminds me I was thinking of something else, about which I should like to speak to you."

CHAPTER CCIX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD LAY IN WAIT FOR THE TRAVELLER ON HAMPSTEAD-HEATH.

"What is it, Jack?"

"Of course you know what we have agreed to do, and that is to get together a sum of money, and then afterwards to fly from England along with Edgworth Bess, and wait until she attains her majority."

"Yes; that it is the plan, and you agreed to it."

"I know I did. What I wanted to know was, what sum of money would be sufficient for our purpose?"

"I have hardly given that a thought."

"But try and form an estimate. How much should you think?"

"It would not do to run short."

"Of course not, nor would it do for us to fix upon too large a sum, and be too long obtaining it."

"Edgworth Bess is safe."

"I cannot think her so while she is in the power of Jonathan Wild."

"Steggs is there watching over her."

"I have no faith in Steggs."

"Nor in any one else, to-night."

"Except yourself, my friend."

"And you have faith in me?"

"Every faith."

"There is some consolation in knowing that."

"I am in earnest when I say it."

"I know you are, and now as for Steggs."

"What of him?"

"I think you do him a great injustice."

"In doubting him?"

"Yes."

"I do not like the man."

"Nor did I; but he has proved himself a friend on so many occasions that I cannot help having confidence in him."

"Well, perhaps it is not misplaced; but then, great as is the faith I have in you, I should not feel satisfied if you occupied Steggs's position in Wild's house."

"Why not?"

"Because you would only be singly opposed to Wild, and he is more than a match for two men. While he attempts no harm against her, of course all is well; but should he take it into his head to do so, what good would Steggs be then?"

"Not much, I am afraid."

"None whatever, and then who can tell what tempting offers Jonathan may hold out to him to induce him to take part against us and her."

"He might, certainly," said Blueskin, thoughtfully. "Jonathan has a rare knack of bending people to his wishes. I do not feel half so easy in my mind as I did now you have begun to talk."

"You do not feel so deep an interest in the poor girl as I do."

"Perhaps not so warm a one."

"Nor so warm a one. I am glad I have made you uneasy, because I am convinced that she is not safe where she is now, and that brings me back to my first question."

"About the money."

"Yes; dismiss from your mind all ideas of amassing a large sum, because it will take too long, and because the risk will be proportionately increased. We must get her away from Wild's house at once."

"I think it would be best."

"I am sure of it. Now, you say that in about one year she will be of age. How much will keep her in comfort for that period of time? Mention the smallest amount."

"You will have many expenses to provide for, such as travelling and such like, which, in foreign countries, you will find very expensive."

"How much?"

"I should think at least five hundred pounds."

"That is a large sum."

"It is; but I do not think you could do with less."

"I am afraid not. Let us fix that as the amount. We may get it very quickly and we may not; but the moment we do possess it, let us hasten to set Edgworth Bess at liberty."

"Agreed."

"Then we will fly and not return to England until it is out of Wild's power to injure her."

"Exactly. I am glad you so much like the plan."

"I do like it, and shall always be grateful to you for devising it."

"It seems feasible."

"It does, indeed, seem more than that; but we shall find it easier to talk about it than to do it."

"What, now, is the most difficult?"

"I can hardly tell; to me they seem about all equal. We shall have a great deal of trouble in getting five hundred pounds, and I cannot see very well how Edgworth Bess is to be got out of Wild's house. Then, as for leaving England, Jonathan will take good care to make that a difficult matter."

"There are many serious obstacles to be overcome; but we must not allow ourselves to be daunted by them. More desperate things have been achieved."

"True. I am glad we have had this bit of conversation, for I think we both understand our positions better than we did."

"I think we do. I can see now that it would have been by far too hazardous to have left Edgworth Bess in Wild's house, in the manner I at first proposed, and the sooner we release her from it the better."

"I am glad to think I have brought you round to such an opinion. At this very moment how can you tell what danger she is threatened with at Wild's hands?"

"Do not speak of it, Jack, I implore you, or you will unnerve me quite. But, see, we have reached our destination. This turning on the right hand will take us direct on to the heath."

"And do you think we shall find a good booty there?"

"Yes. People are obliged to cross it, and often they have large sums in their possession. The beauty of the place is, that there are no houses near, so that the report of a pistol creates no alarm."

"I see."

"I trust we shall be fortunate to take what we want in one booty."

"That is too much to be hoped for, I think."

"Pho!—pho! I have heard of such things."

"Then I only hope we shall be so lucky, but I confess I have my doubts."

"It is all luck, Jack—all luck. This way. How confoundedly dark it is. We shall be upon the middle road directly, where we shall stand the best chance of meeting with people worth stopping."

"It is fearfully dark, Blue. I cannot tell at all where I am going."

"The old heath is always dark at night. You must keep me in sight. I know the way well. When we once get upon the hard roadway it will be all right enough."

"Go on, then, I will follow close after you."

The heath was indeed profoundly dark—much darker than any one can now expect to see it, for not only was it far away from London, but nearly thrice the size it now is.

To be sure, there were cottages here and there, and one or two gentlemen's residences, but at the present time this picturesque and romantic spot is almost surrounded with dwellings.

Relying upon his intimate knowledge of the spot, Blueskin was leading the way across a narrow footpath which led into the road, which, from the fact of its dividing the heath into two tolerably equal portions, was called the Middle-road.

This road he reached in perfect safety, and as soon as he emerged upon it, he drew in his steed, and waited for Jack to rejoin him.

As soon as he did so he said—

"Come a little further, and I will show you as good a position for attacking a traveller as any knight of the road could wish to have."

"Whereabouts is it?"

"About half-way up a rather steep hill. It is very dark."

"It can't be much darker than this."

"Oh! but it is the banks on both sides that throw a shadow upon it, even in daylight. Being on the hill, you must understand, every one who ascends, by the time he gets half-way, will be going at a slow pace, which will make it all the easier for us to stop him."

"I see. Is it far from this hill you speak of?"

"No. Only a few yards. Indeed, I do not know if it does not begin here. However, keep straight on; you will soon become sensible of the rise."

Jack soon found this to be perfectly true.

In a little time he found himself upon rapidly rising ground.

"Now walk," said Blueskin, "we have plenty of time, and we shall not only better be able to hear if any one is approaching, but if there are any, they will not hear us."

There was sound sense in this, so Jack immediately reduced his horse's speed to a walk.

The hill was a very steep one, and after ascending it a certain distance, Blueskin commanded a halt.

"Here we are now, Jack. The way we have just come is the high-road from London, and it is of course from travellers coming in that direction that we must expect the best booty from. As near as possible, we are half-way up the hill. Don't you find it very dark?"

"I do. I can just see you and your horse, and that is all. I believe if I was once to take my eyes off you I should not be able to see you again."

"That makes it so much the better. Now, listen. Can you hear anything?"

"No."

"Nor can I. However, look carefully to the primings of your pistols, so that they shall not fail you in the moment of need."

"You mean feel for your priming, for I'll be hanged if you can see!"

The clicking of pistol-locks followed.

Presently Blueskin asked—

"Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"Then ride down the hill about twenty paces, and take up your position on this side of the road. Do not move. If a traveller comes let him pass you. I will stop him at the top, and then you ride up and cry, 'Stand!' which will make him think he is surrounded."

CHAPTER COX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COMMIT A DESPERATE HIGHWAY ROBBERY ON HAMPSTEAD-HEATH.

"That is a capital plan, Blueskin. Any one could tell you were not a green hand at this sort of thing. I quite understand what you mean, and you can rely upon my carrying out your idea fully."

"Off you go, then, and get yourself placed before any one comes. You must mind and not do anything to attract their attention, or you will put them on their guard."

"Trust me for that."

As he spoke, Jack turned his horse's head in the direction he intended to take, and descended the hill about twenty paces, as his comrade had directed.

He stopped, and then backed his horse to the side of the road, until the steep furze-grown bank prevented him going further.

Thus placed, and certainly the positions they had taken up were most admirably suited for their purpose, the two highwaymen waited patiently, listening with the greatest eagerness for any sounds which would indicate a traveller's approach.

At length their patience was rewarded.

In the far distance, and at first scarcely distinguishable above the wind, which moaned wailingly over the rugged surface of the heath, there arose the faint tramping of a horse's feet.

The sound was heard simultaneously by Jack and Blueskin, but it would never have reached their ears so quickly as it did had not their sense of hearing been stretched to the utmost.

Blueskin whistled faintly, and Jack responded, after which they were both quite silent.

At rather a sharp trot came on a single horseman.

They could soon tell that.

Louder, and louder, and more distinct became the sounds as he drew nearer.

That rider little thought as he came along who was lying in wait for him.

Suddenly, however, he checked his horse's speed, as though in some doubt about the way he ought to take, and this seemed evidenced by the fact that when he started again he came on much more carefully than before.

Then came the hill, which he ascended at a walk.

Immovable and silent, the two highwaymen waited for him to approach.

Seeing his hesitation, the strange idea crossed Jack's mind whether he had not received some admonition of his danger.

He was neither a stranger to, nor a disbeliever in pre-emptiments, and he much wondered whether that which was about to occur had overshadowed his mind.

But, let this be as it may, the traveller came slowly up the hill.

At length he passed Jack, who prepared for action.

Another moment, and he was near enough for Blueskin's purpose, and he immediately darted out from his place of ambush.

"Stand!" he cried, in a voice that rang with many a strange echoes over the vast expanse of heath. "Stand. If you advance another step it will be at the peril of your life!"

These words had due effect and significance upon the traveller, who halted, and, turning round, prepared to flee.

But Jack emerged from his place of concealment, and accordingly he likewise cried "Stand!"

"I am surrounded, then, it seems," said the traveller, in a loud and undaunted voice; "but I will make a fight of it for all that. Ye villains, I am an honest man, and will not yield that which I have had to labour hard to get without a struggle."

"You had best make no resistance," said Blueskin, spurring up to him, and holding one of his holster-pistols in his hand. "Give what money you have about you, and pass on! We do not want to harm you."

"I will not submit. Take that!"

With great suddenness the traveller drew from the breast of his apparel a pistol, and fired it full at Blueskin.

For a moment the latter believed he was shot, but ere he could recover himself, Jack Sheppard rode close up to the traveller's side, and seized his arm.

But only just in time.

The traveller had drawn a second pistol, and was in the very act of drawing the trigger when Jack seized him, and the position of his arm being altered, the pistol was discharged in the air.

Jack had a pistol in his other hand, and pressing it against the traveller, was about to fire, to avenge, as he thought, his comrade's death, when Blueskin, having recovered himself, grasped one of his pistols by the barrel, and struck the traveller a violent blow upon the head with the butt-end of it.

He fell to the ground in a moment, like a heavy mass of inert matter, while the horse, giving one plunge, darted off at full gallop down the hill towards London before either Jack or Blueskin could prevent it.

"Curse it all!" exclaimed the latter, in an angry voice, "this is doomed to be an unfortunate affair after all. That horse will surely be stopped by somebody before long, and then, of course, they will know what is the matter."

"Let us make haste, then," said Jack. "We will rifle his pockets and begone."

"Confound him! I never thought he would have been so desperate and handy with his firearms. What a fool the man must be to peril his life for a few paltry guineas!"

The two highwaymen dismounted, and Blueskin stooped over the traveller, while Jack held the horses, whom the firing had rendered very restive.

A faint groan from the wounded man came to Blueskin's ears as he stooped over him; but not heeding it, he commenced rifling his pockets.

He found very little to reward him for his trouble.

There was a bag of money, but no very great amount he could tell by the weight, even supposing it to be gold, when it was just as likely to be silver.

There was a watch with its appendages, and a few other personal ornaments of little value, which he took, and that was all.

While engaged in making a second and more rigorous search, he heard the loud tramp of many horses' feet, while at the same moment Jack Sheppard called out, in a voice of alarm—

"Enemies, Jack!" said Blueskin. "Enemies! I have got all there is to take. Mount as quick as you can, and follow me."

Just as he spoke, there was a bright flash in the darkness, succeeded by the report of a pistol, but the person who fired it was too far off for it to do them any injury.

Still it warned them to be speedy, and showed them that they had enemies in their rear, and who were in good earnest bent upon their capture.

The two highwaymen, however, sprang lightly and quickly into their saddles, and Blueskin set the example of going at full speed up the hill.

Jack Sheppard kept him in view, and followed hard upon his heels, but we must leave them for a little while, so that we can turn our attention to their pursuers, and relate who they were, and how it was they came to be so quickly upon their track.

To do this, it will be necessary to go back to the proceedings of Jonathan Wild.

The reader will, without doubt, remember that the last we saw of him was in company with Lord Donnull, who he had promised to take to Edgworth Bess.

But, instead of going upstairs to that bedroom on the second floor, we have seen how he led his dupe, for such the nobleman to all intents and purposes was, downstairs into the hall, and thence through the often-described iron grating leading down to the subterranean prison beneath his house.

What was his purpose will be quickly seen.

Upon reaching the bottom of the flight of stone steps, they paused for a moment in that gloomy corridor from which the cells on both sides opened.

It was dimly lighted was this corridor by an oil lamp, which hung from the ceiling and cast a flickering and uncertain radiance around it.

A cold air was in the place, and his lordship involuntarily let his teeth chatter.

"What place is this, Wild?" he asked, and not without some trepidation in the tone in which he spoke. "What place is this?"

"A part of my mansion, your lordship, and where I keep some of my most valuable possessions."

"But it is like a jail!"

"You can give it that name if you think proper. I have got a name for it myself."

"What is that?"

"Little Newgate."

"Little Newgate!" repeated his lordship, musingly, "that is a strange name."

"Why so, my lord?"

"I don't know—it seems strange. But let us go away from here; the air is cold, and I can feel it cold about my heart."

"Do you forget your errand?"

"No; but surely, Wild—surely you do not mean to say that—that?"

"That what, my lord?"

"That you have immured that poor delicate girl in such a place as this?"

Jonathan Wild made an impatient and affirmative gesture as he replied—

"You must not be too passionate. But come, it is cold standing here at the bottom of these steps. I feel chilled myself."

"Where would you take me!"

"Not much further. You seem strangely unwilling—now, I thought you were anxious to see this girl."

"I am—I am."

"Come this way, then; but let me ask you, for the last time, what are your intentions in this matter?"

"I have already told them to you."

"But has your mind undergone any change?"

"No; I am tired of this existence. Now I possess them, the wealth and rank which I once so much coveted fall upon me. Show me the true heiress, Jonathan Wild!—leave me alone with her. If she is willing to look over what I have done, I will, without loss of time, place her in a position as proud as any in this land. Show her to me, Wild; show her to me, in order that I can make this offer, which I ought to have done long, long ago, and then much misery would have been spared to me!"

CHAPTER CCXI.

JONATHAN WILD DISPOSES OF LORD DONMULL.

JONATHAN WILD distorted his lips into a derisive grin, as Lord Donmull thus spoke, while he half muttered—

"He is a fool—an ass, and fully deserves the fate to which I would predoom him; and so, with his mawkish sentimentality, he would ruin and overthrow all those glorious plans for my own aggrandizement which I had formed. Never!—never! If I take it in time, it is yet in my power to prevent that, at any rate."

"What do you say?" asked Lord Donmull, who could tell his companion was saying something, though he could not catch the import of his words. "What do you say?"

"Nothing, my lord—nothing. I was only sorry to find your lordship so despondent. Cheer up, my lord. Recollect what an important step it is which you are going to take. When it is once done, there is no undoing it."

"So much the better, Wild, so much the better. As for the reward I offered you, I consider you have fully earned it, and I will pay you just the same as if things had turned out as I at first intended. Make your mind easy about that, Mr. Wild."

"Very good, your lordship. I am here at your commands. If it is still your desire to see your niece, and offer her reparation, follow me, and I will lead you to where she is."

"Lead on then, Wild, and quickly. I am impatient to see her. Lead on. Oh! this place. To think that you could have placed such a one as she is in this noisome prison-house."

Jonathan Wild took no notice of this last remark, but convinced in his mind that Lord Donmull was incorrigible, he led the way along the gloomy corridor.

At the last door on the right-hand side he paused.

Lord Donmull paused beside him.

Where they stood was in semi-darkness.

The oil lamp did not send forth a sufficient light to disperse the darkness which hung about that spot.

How dark must the interior of that cell be which, as the reader knows, received the whole of its illumination and fresh air through the small opening above the door.

With great deliberation, Jonathan took a key from his pocket.

Standing in the obscurity which we have described, his lordship could not perceive the hideous expression upon the thief-taker's countenance.

But if he could have seen it, how his heart would have been dismayed.

He, however, had no warning.

Jonathan Wild thrust the key into the lock.

He had to apply both his hands before he could turn it in its rusty wards, but at length it gave way.

Then he pushed the door a little way open upon its hinges.

"Walk in, my lord. You will find her there. Walk in."

"But the place is dark."

"You will find it all right when you get inside."

"But, Wild—"

Jonathan's eyes gleamed.

His lordship saw the ominous brightness, even in the dark.

"Go in, my lord," he said again, seeing that his companion hesitated. "Go in, I say. You will find there all that you can possibly want."

But his lordship still lingered.

Suspicion that all was not right flashed upon his mind, and instead of advancing, as the thief-taker directed, he drew back.

"Have you determined to alter your mind, my lord, that, even at the last moment, you retract. Do not, I beg, be so vacillating. Will you see her, or will you not?"

"Where is she?"

"In there."

"Let her come here to me."

"Impossible. Enter. It can do no harm to speak to her, at any rate."

"I do not like the place—I do not like the place."

"Pho—pho; you will find it all right when you get inside. Enter, I tell you."

"No—no. I cannot—dare not—go in."

His lordship shrunk still further back as he spoke.

Jonathan Wild glared at him like a tiger.

"Cannot—dare not. Tush! tush! my lord. I'll make you!"

These last words were uttered with sudden vehemence, and darting forward, the thief-taker caught hold of the nobleman by his throat.

A faint shriek for aid was uttered, but it died away almost instantly.

"I have had enough of this," said Jonathan, in a voice of suppressed and concentrated passion. "I have had enough! Do you think I am a fool, to be played upon by your pusillanimous fears? No, they last no longer! This way! I will provide you with board and lodging for a time. Perhaps, when you show yourself more sensible, I will release you."

Lord Donmull struggled desperately.

But in the hands of Jonathan Wild, much as that worthy's strength had been diminished, he was as a child, and as little capable of making effectual resistance.

Grappling with him, Jonathan forced him to the ground, then dragged him along the stone pavement, in the direction of the open cell.

Slowly but surely he dragged him to this place, until at length, having got him upon the threshold, and summoning all his strength to his aid, he fairly lifted him, and flung him into the cell.

His lordship reached the ground with a sickening crash; but before he could recover himself enough to shriek out or move, Jonathan banged the door after him, and turned the key in the lock.

"Ha! ha!" he said, as he took his way along the corridor in the direction of the stone steps leading to the grating, "there is one fool disposed of who, if I would have allowed it, would have ruined all my plans. Curse him! But never mind; he is done with now. I must bring affairs to a crisis, however. It will not do to dally longer. Curse the girl! if she was but twelve months older than she is, all would be easy and straightforward. But it is no use to wish that; it is one of the things that cannot be altered. I must wait—I must wait."

By the time he had reached this point in his reflections, Jonathan reached the flight of steps.

The man at the grating, seeing him approach, opened it, and allowed him to pass through.

As he closed the iron door behind him, Wild said—

"Jenkunson."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"When you feed the prisoners please to recollect that there is a fresh one in C. 10."

"A! right, Mr. Wild. I will attend to it, sir."

Jonathan strode on.

He came to the door of the office, and here he entered.

He glanced at his watch as he did so, and saw that it was two o'clock.

"I am neglecting my private business shamefully, he said: "but never mind, I am independent of it any day. How hungry I feel! What an intolerable nuisance it is that we should have to sleep and eat! How much more could be performed! Why, most of us, if we live forty years, spend twenty-five of them in sleep!"

Musing thus, Jonathan went out into hall again.

Quilt Arnold was standing there.

"Has anyone else been, Quilt?"

"No one important, sir."

"Good. Have you heard anything of Jack Sheppard?"

"Nothing, Mr. Wild."

"Curse him! But let him go on, I am sure to have him in the end."

"Of course you are, sir."

"I am going round the corner to get something to eat, so, if any one comes, you will know where to find me."

Jonathan did not wait for any reply, but strode out of the front door.

Crossing over the road, he turned the corner of Giltspur-street, and entering the eating-house where he usually took his meals, he sat down and ate a hearty meal, enough to last him for twelve hours at least.

Then he returned home.

"Quilt," he said; "to-night, between nine and half-past, have a troop of a dozen men, all well mounted and armed, at the door. I shall start at that hour with them to search the highroads round London for Blueskin and Jack Sheppard. Do you understand?"

"Quite, Mr. Wild, and you may rely upon its being done."

"That is enough; see to it."

"Shall I provide a horse for you?"

"Yes, let it be a good, sound, strong one, capable of enduring a little fatigue. While I am gone you must take charge of the house."

"Very good, sir."

"I have been knocked about a great deal lately, and don't feel altogether so strong and well as I ought. I fancy it is sleep I require, so I shall go up stairs and lie down till then, so do not let me be disturbed by any one, but, if I should not be down at nine, call me."

"You may rely upon all your commands being properly obeyed, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan ascended the stairs.

But, before he entered his own sleeping chamber, he went up to the second-floor landing, where he found Stegga sitting at his post.

"Is all well?" he asked.

"Quite, Mr. Wild."

"That is right. Be watchful and faithful."

"There's nothing at all happened."

"It is very strange," muttered Wild, as he descended the stairs, "very strange. I cannot make out Mary's death at all. Confound her, too, her dead body must be somewhere in the house. It must be disposed of. I have been in a whirl ever since Jack Sheppard escaped from Newgate, and I have forgotten all about it. I must not neglect that longer than to-morrow. She must be buried, at any rate, but I would freely give a hundred pounds this moment if I knew how she had come by her death."

Thus speaking, Jonathan went into his room, and threw himself down on the bed, and was soon deep in sleep.

Edgworth Bess was safe yet.

CHAPTER CXXII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ARE CHASED ACROSS HAMPESTEAD-HEATH BY JONATHAN WILD.

JONATHAN WILD awoke with the sounds of some clock striking the hour of nine in his ears.

He leaped to his feet instantly.

On the stairs he met Quilt, who was coming up to call him.

"Is all ready?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan could not get the thoughts of his quondam wife out of his head, so he said—

"Quilt."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"When—when Mary Milliner was killed, what became of her body?"

"It was put back into her room."

"And is it there now?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"That should not have been. She ought to have been attended to before now."

"What will you have done with her?"

"Buried, of course."

"Where, sir."

"Remind me of it when I come back, and I will tell what is to be done."

"All right, Mr. Wild."

Jonathan passed out of the front door.

Thirteen powerful horses stood in the street.

Twelve of them carried Wild's janizaries upon their backs.

The thirteenth was set aside for him.

The long sleep he had had, had done wonders in refreshing him.

He felt almost like himself again as going down the steps he mounted his horse.

He was well armed, and his men also.

Which way to look for those he so wished to capture he had no idea.

He would have to trust to his luck entirely.

What his determination was is easily explained.

Beginning with that movement, he had made up his mind to patrol the various highways leading from London every night until he learned something of them.

He had plenty of ways to choose.

There was the North-road—the West-road—the Edgware-road—the Dover-road.

But after a moment's deliberation he determined to take neither of these, but go in the direction of Hampstead.

No sooner had he come to this decision than he gave his men the order to move forward.

He led the way down Snow-hill and over the bridge, across the Fleet-ditch, and up the steep ascent of Holborn-hill.

Then turning to his right, up Grays Inn-lane, he made his way in an almost direct line to the place he wished to reach.

From what we have related, the reader must be aware that Jonathan Wild must have reached the heath at about the same time as Blueskin and Jack Sheppard—neither of whom for a moment thought their enemy was so near.

But such strange coincidences will at times occur.

The only difference was, that the two highwaymen and the thief-taker reached the heath from two different points.

It was Jonathan and his party who had arrived so suddenly and unexpectedly upon the spot where the encounter with the traveller took place, and the thief-taker guessed in a moment who the robbers were.

Accordingly, he fired his pistol, though he might have known that he was too far off to do them any harm.

He stuck his spurs into his steed, however, and pursued our friends vigorously.

The steep hill tried the horses greatly.

But on reaching the top of it they loosed their reins, and truck the horses sharply.

They went down at a fearful speed.

Jonathan Wild knew the traveller must be on the road-way somewhere, for he had met his horse, and he had the conviction on his own mind that those who were flying on the road before him were no other than those whose capture he so earnestly wished to accomplish.

The grounds he had for coming to this conclusion were not very definite.

Still the idea was hanging in his mind that they were most likely to be found upon the highway.

He knew they had no means of subsistence, and that they must live.

The readiest means, he argued, that would occur to them to get what they required, would be going on the highway.

A desperate robbery had been committed.

He had arrived just a little too late upon the scene of action.

He could tell, however, by the regular beat of the horses' hoofs, that there were two persons on the road before him, and thus strengthened him in his notion that they were Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

That he was quite correct in this chance supposition the reader does not require to be told.

He plunged his spur deeply into his horse's sides—so deeply that the poor animal would bound forward as if mad, and utter occasionally sharp cries of pain.

At the top of his voice he called out to his men, offering



[THE MEETING OF JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGORTH BESS.]

them every possible inducement he could think of to press forward in the pursuit.

They tore over the rough uneven ground of the heath with a speed that was really terrific.

On their parts, although they were not able to account for his presence there just then, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard both felt sure that those who were behind them were headed by their implacable and invincible enemy, Jonathan Wild.

He was fairly on their track now, and their position was critical.

His skill in hunting down any one had been remarkably proved more than once, and, therefore, Blueskin felt that the only means by which they could escape him would be by the adoption of some stratagem.

Casting his eyes, therefore, around him, he strove to pierce the darkness, and ascertain their precise whereabouts.

For a little while he was unable to do this, for what with going at the speed he did, and then the darkness

of the night, it was next to impossible for him to say where he was.

But continuing his efforts, he at length became sensible that he had left the heath behind, and was pursuing a westerly direction.

If he continued this, he knew that ere long he must emerge upon the Edgware-road, somewhere in the vicinity of Kilburn, which was then a tiny village some miles distant from London.

Having made this discovery, he communicated it to Jack, who had some difficulty in understanding what he said, owing to the wind carrying his words away as he uttered them.

In the rear they could hear the dull muffled tramp of their pursuers.

"It will not do to keep up like this," said Blueskin. "If we do, Jonathan will hunt us down as sure as fate. I know him of old. Once upon our track, like he is now, he will continue it like a bloodhound until he runs us to cover."

"But what are we to do?"

"I have been trying to think of a scheme to elude him for the last few minutes."

"Have you hit upon one?"

"No."

"Try."

"I have."

"Did you think of one at all?"

"Yes."

"What is it, then? Let us hear it."

"It is so simple a one that I am afraid Jonathan will not be imposed upon by it."

"Tell it to me."

"I thought this. Suppose we were to release our feet from the stirrups, and having got the horses up to a good speed, slip off their backs, and let them go down the road without us."

"Capital."

"It is a stale dodge, Jack, and one that Wild is well up to. If we were to slacken our speed, or stop to get off, he would know what we were doing as well as possible."

"Never mind. Get up a good speed, and then slip off. If our feet are free from the stirrups we can't hurt ourselves much. But then what are we to do?"

"We might hide behind this hedge until Jonathan and his crew went past."

"So we might; but look here, Blue, a better thought strikes me."

"Be quick, and tell it, then, Jonathan is gaining upon us rapidly."

"Suppose, instead of hiding behind the hedge, where Wild might perhaps find us, we were to climb up one of these trees that go all along the road? They are leafy ones, and the branches grow low, so that we shall have no difficulty in getting one and should be up in a trice."

"So we should, Jack. I like that idea vastly. If we can only slip off!"

"We shall have to be very quick in our movements."

"We shall."

"And be careful how we slip off, for if we either of us got stunned it would be a case with us."

"We must take care. Are you ready?"

"Yes. But, Blue."

"What?"

"How about the horses?"

"Never mind them."

"What will the old Jew say?"

"We must make matters right with him. Never mind the horses; let them go where they like. Are you quite ready?"

"Yes."

"Off with you, then."

Even as he spoke, Blueskin, who had quite freed his feet from the stirrups as he proceeded, put his very perilous manoeuvre into execution.

But in spite of the care he took to prevent such a result, he fell heavily to the ground.

His horse, however, never stopped a moment, and half terrified by what had occurred, went much faster down the lane.

Jack had fallen, too, and rolled over and over upon the roadway, but it would seem that, being the lightest, he had sustained the least injury, for he was the first to gain his feet.

The horses were already a good way off, while the sounds of their pursuers became uncomfortably distinct.

CHAPTER CCXIII.

OUR FRIENDS FIND THEIR SCHEME SUCCEED TO ADMIRATION.

THE first thing, however, that Jack did was to look around him for his comrade.

He found him extended upon the ground, not exhibiting the least signs of life or motion.

With the dread at his heart that what they had talked about had occurred—namely, that Blueskin had been stunned by the fall, Jack made his way towards him.

Their position seemed now to be most perilous.

Had they taken the pains they had only to accomplish their own capture?

In a few minutes Jonathan would be upon them.

Jack stooped down.

To his infinite relief, the moment he did so Blueskin spoke.

"Help me up, Jack. I am hurt a little, but not much. I shall be all right again in a minute."

These were cheering words, so Jack hastened to raise him to his feet, and when that was done Blueskin pronounced himself to be wonderfully better.

"Quick, then, as you value your life. I question now whether we shall be able to climb before Wild is upon us."

"Take it easy, Jack. He is some distance off yet—further than I expected, a great deal. He must have halted for something, or else we gained upon him surprisingly during the last few minutes."

"So much the better, then, for us," said Jack. "Now, are you better?"

"Oh! yes, much better."

"Well, then, look before you."

"I do."

"Can you see that tree?"

"Yes."

"Take that one. It is easiest to climb. You see the lowest branch is within reach of your hand."

"All right, Jack."

"I will take the one next to it. Quick! Blue—quick!"

With a good deal of uneasiness, Jack saw that his comrade had been much bruised and shaken by his fall, and now he only seemed partially conscious of what he was about.

However, he went straight to the tree, and when he reached it, a fresh accession of vigour seemed to come over him, and, seizing the lowest branch with both hands, he mounted rapidly.

Seeing this, Jack prepared to mount himself, but did not commence until his friend was fairly hidden among the foliage.

Lithe and agile as Sheppard was, the feat of climbing a tree was the simplest thing possible to him.

He was up among the branches in a moment.

His first act was to speak in a low tone of voice to his companion.

"Blue—Blue."

"Yes, Jack."

"Are you safe?"

"Quite."

"Keep still."

"Do not fear."

"Are you much hurt?"

"No. Scarcely at all."

"I am glad of that."

"I was half-stunned for the moment, but I have quite got over that now."

"Hush! Jonathan comes."

"He does. Do not speak again."

"Nor move, for the least rustle might betray us."

There was not a movement—there was not a whisper after this was said.

Breathlessly and eagerly they awaited the approach of their indomitable foe.

Was their stratagem to be successful?

We shall soon see.

On came Wild and his men.

Their speed was a rapid one.

Blueskin and Jack were, however, quite right in supposing that he had paused.

It was only for a moment or two, though.

While in full pursuit off the heath Jonathan felt certain that they would adopt some cunning stratagem to get out of his way.

He never for a moment anticipated he should have the least chance of running them down.

When the thought occurred to him, the first thing he did was to cast about him, and, by imagining himself in their position, think what would be the likeliest thing to be done.

There was the old dodge of sending the horses on and hiding in the hedge.

They might try to adopt that.

If they did, he could easily discover them.

Accordingly he halted, and called his men around him.

"I think it very likely," he said, "that Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, who are on the road before us, will try some scheme for eluding us. For instance, they might dismount, and send their horses riderless at full gallop

down the lane, while in the meantime they hide in the hedge. But we can prevent them escaping us by any such means as that if you will attend to what I say."

The men gathered eagerly around him.

The large reward he had offered, and the vexation they felt at the two fugitives having so often slipped through their fingers, made them exceedingly desirous of their capture.

"I shall want four of you to separate from the main body and go on the other side of the hedge—two on one side of the road and two on the other. You will be able to make your way over the meadows easily enough, and mind you keep as close to the hedge row as you can, so that, if they are hiding there, they will be sure to be discovered. Quick, now; two on each side."

The men understood him in a moment, and saw how admirably the scheme was calculated to effect the end proposed.

With all speed, therefore, two men got through the hedge on the right-hand side of the road and two on the left. There seemed nothing but meadows for a considerable distance, so their progress would be easy enough.

Seeing all was ready, Jonathan gave the order to move forward.

Those behind the hedge, of course, had to keep pace with the others, and they found this to be rather hazardous work.

Still they went on without the occurrence of any accident.

From this it is certain that if our friends had simply hidden in the hedge, as Blueskin had proposed, they would most unquestionably have been discovered.

Their safety, then, was attributable to Jack, who had proposed the amendment on the original plan of climbing up the tree.

Jonathan Wild came to the spot where they were hidden.

So absorbed were our two friends in listening to his approach by the roadway, that the first intimation they had of the men being in the meadows was when they rode exactly beneath the trees in which they were concealed.

Of course they made no discovery of them, and the whole troop went on their way down the lane.

Jack and Blueskin did not venture either to move or to speak until some few moments after they were both out of sight and hearing.

Seeing this little bit of policy on Jonathan's part, they could not tell how far his cunning might extend.

Then they thought, reasonably enough, that there might be some more to bring up the rear.

But in this expectation they were disappointed.

All sounds, save those slight uncertain ones which are always to be heard at night, died away.

Then Blueskin ventured to speak.

But it was in a very low tone of voice.

"Jack, Jack."

"Yes, Blue."

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Do not speak any louder than you are obliged."

"The coast seems quite clear."

"I know it. But then"—

"What?"

"Hark!"

"I hear nothing."

"No, it's all right, I fancied I did."

"Will you descend?"

"Not just yet."

"Wild has gone."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Did you notice these men who came behind the hedge?"

"Yes."

"That was a close touch."

"I know it."

"Do you see his cleverness?"

"Yes."

"He had got the idea in his head that we intended to trick him."

"And we have done so."

"Perhaps."

"Why perhaps?"

"His men may not have all gone by. They might be lurking somewhere close at hand, and would pounce upon us the moment we got to the ground."

"How shall we ascertain that?"

"By waiting here a little while."

"It will be best not to talk, then?"

"It will."

"Then I am silent; but say when you think we have waited long enough."

"I will tell you when I think it is safe."

"Very well. I leave it all to you, because I think you know Wild and his ways better than I do."

Blueskin did not seem to think it worth while to make any reply to this speech.

He remained silent, and listening for any little sound that might indicate the presence of his foes.

Half an hour, perhaps rather more, elapsed.

During that time no sound had occurred that seemed at all of a suspicious character.

Feeling by that time tolerably secure he was about to call out to Jack to descend, when the faint tramp, tramp of horses' feet struck upon his ear.

He became still again instantly.

The sounds rapidly increased in loudness.

Jack heard them, too, but he neither moved nor spoke.

At first it was difficult to say what the sounds meant, but in a little while they both came to the conclusion that it was Wild and his party returning.

The horsemen, be they whom they might, were certainly coming from the direction in which Wild had gone a little while back.

On they came at an easy pace.

Suddenly, however, when the whole party was on a level with the trees in which our friends were concealed, a voice cried out in a loud tone—

"Halt!"

The order was obeyed with military promptitude.

CHAPTER CCXIV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN AGREE TO ROB WILD'S WAREHOUSE AT WESTMINSTER.

If there had been any doubts in the minds of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard as to who the horsemen were, the sound of the voice which pronounced the word "Halt!" would have dispelled them.

There was no other man being than Jonathan Wild who possessed such a voice.

The very natural apprehension filled the breasts of both the fugitives that Jonathan's motive for halting just there was because in some mysterious and incomprehensible manner he had been made acquainted with their hiding-place.

But they were wrong in that supposition.

Jonathan's halting there was a mere matter of chance, and the same thing might have happened a hundred yards further up the lane.

After giving the word to halt, the first thing that Wild did was to pour out a volley of curses of the most awful description, which were chiefly levelled at our two friends.

But having expended his wrath in this manner, Jonathan grew calmer.

"They have bilked us again, by all that's holy!" he said. "I do begin to believe that they have got the devil in league with them to aid them, or how could they have disappeared? Keep a sharp look all around you, my men, and go gently back to London. We may light upon them yet. They must be lying hidden somewhere, I am certain. Forward, gently!"

At a gentle trot Wild and his band now made their way along the lane back to London again, looking carefully all about them, but unsuccessfully.

As on the former occasion, Blueskin did not speak or move until they were quite out of earshot. Then he said—

"Descend."

"All right, Blue."

Jack had been waiting for this order, and was glad enough to receive it.

He was down on the ground in a trice.

Blueskin descended more slowly, but only a short time elapsed before he was by his side.

Their first impulse, after passing through this great danger, was to clasp each other by the hand.

"We are safely through that, Jack," said Blueskin, "and I can assure you it is almost more than I expected."

"We have had a narrow escape."

"You are right there. We have."

"But I think Jonathan has gone back to London this time."

"So do I."

"I think the best thing we can do is to make haste back after him."

"To London?"

"Yes."

"I think so, too."

"But what are we to do about the two horses?"

"Leave that to me. I will make it all right."

"Very well. Shall we get through the hedge into the lane?"

"Yes."

"Which way do you think of getting back to London?"

"We must walk, I suppose."

"So do I. But I mean which way shall we take?"

Blueskin considered a moment.

"If we go on a little further," he said, "we shall get into the Edgware-road, and I fancy if we turn down that, it will be our nearest and best way."

"It will certainly be the contrary one to that taken by Jonathan Wild."

"I know it, and that is one of the reasons why I think it will be best."

"Let us make our way there, then. You are sure this lane will take us out into the Edgware-road?"

"Quite sure. I know exactly whereabouts we are."

"That is all right, then."

Our two friends having scrambled through the hedge, proceeded along the lane as Blueskin advised.

All was quite still around them, and they met with nothing that pointed to the presence of Jonathan Wild, which confirmed them in their supposition that he had made his way straight back to London.

Every moment then served to give them fresh confidence. At length they came to where the lane terminated in the Edgware-road.

Blueskin notified this fact to his companion, who said—

"We have got a fair chance now, so let us try if we cannot ascertain what sort of a booty we have got, for I can assure you I am very anxious to know."

"It is dark, and we may have some trouble."

"Never mind the trouble. Let us set down on this bank, and try to form an estimate of it."

Blueskin complied.

"There is a watch," he said, "and one or two other little things of not much value."

"Never mind them; there is a bag, is there not?"

"Yes; but it is neither so large nor so heavy as I should have wished."

As he spoke Blueskin took from his pocket the bag of money he had robbed the traveller of.

"If it is all gold," he said, "it won't be such a bad night's work; but, from the feel of some of the coins, I am sadly afraid it is silver."

"Don't say that."

"However, we shall soon know."

The string which secured the purse was untied, and then, turning it upside down, Blueskin poured the contents into his hand.

His presentiment was realized.

It was nearly all silver, and at the outside the aggregate amount of the whole did not exceed five pounds.

This was a bitter disappointment to Jack, who reflected upon the peril they had incurred, and the narrow escape they had had to procure such a paltry sum.

He could not forbear expressing his disappointment to Blueskin.

"Why, supposing we avoid capture, which is not very likely while Jonathan is in his present mood, how long will it take to get together the sum we require?"

"But, Jack, that would not be a fair way to reckon; because we have been unlucky to-night, that is no reason why we always should be."

"I don't like the plan, Blue. I am sure it will not answer. With the power he has at his command, Jonathan Wild will take such measures that it will be

utterly impossible for us to avoid capture at his hands, and then what would become of Edgworth Bess. She would be left alone and helpless in that villain's hands."

"Get up, Jack. Let us walk along the road and talk a little. You are taking to-night's failure too much to heart, I am sure you are."

"I am not, Blueskin. Take my word for it, we have gone the wrong way to work."

"Can you suggest any better scheme?"

"Not just this moment I cannot."

"Well, think. If you can hit upon anything likely, I shall be glad enough to agree to it. But I do not know what else you could think of."

"Stop a minute."

"What is it?"

"A thought strikes me."

"Oh! is that all. I fancied you heard our pursuers."

"No—no. Blueskin."

"Yes, Jack."

"Do you recollect soon after our affair at the Grange you took me to a place of Wild's, at the Horseferry, Westminster?"

"Yes."

"Where Jonathan keeps a good deal of swag?"

"Yes."

"Does he do so now?"

"That is more than I could exactly take upon myself to say. I daresay he does."

"Well, then."

"What would you do? Rob him?"

"Certainly."

"It is a good plan, Jack."

"I am glad you are of that opinion."

"My only wonder is that I did not think of it before."

"It is a wonder."

"But it will be a difficult piece of business."

"Never mind that."

"And we are more likely to fail than succeed."

"We can but try, Blue."

"That's true."

"We shall run no more risk than we did to-night."

"Well, no, I suppose not."

"And, Blueskin, we can almost make sure of taking at one stroke more than we require for our purpose, and it must stand to sense that the sooner we get the money, and have Bess safe out of Wild's power, the better it will be for everybody."

"I don't dispute that."

"Well, then, what have you to say against it?"

"Nothing."

"Well, then, I have nothing to say against it, having made the proposal."

"There is only one thing. It is just possible that Jonathan may have come to the conclusion that it is no longer a safe place to hold his treasures, and we may have all our trouble for nothing."

"We must run our risk of that."

"Come on, then."

"Did you think of making the attempt to-night?"

"Why not?"

"I have nothing to say against to-night, of course; the sooner the better, I say."

"Very well, then; I consider to-night offers a better chance than any."

"How so?"

"Jonathan will doubtless make his way straight home, under the conviction that we are hiding somewhere on or about Hampstead-Heath, and he will wait until he hears something of us."

"I see."

"I would give a trifle if we had our horses back again. If we had I should gallop straight from here to the Horseferry, and, if possible, effect our purpose to-night. Then the following night, when Jonathan's attention is taken up with his loss, we will get into his house, and carry off Edgworth Bess."

"Oh! Blueskin, my friend, that does, indeed, sound like a plan that is feasible. Oh! if we could but be set down in Westminster this moment."

"It is folly to wish for impossibilities."

"So it is."

"We must use our wits, and hit upon some means of getting there with as little delay as possible."

"Do you know of any horses that we can hire hereabouts?"

"No, I do not; but I'll tell you what there is, though it would be running a great risk."

"Never mind the risk," said Jack, impetuously; "let us hear what it is that you have just thought of."

CHAPTER CCXV.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD MAKE THE BEST OF THEIR WAY TO LONDON.

"As I daresay you know, Jack," said Blueskin, "there is a coach which passes this way."

"Yes."

"Well, I think this is somewhere about the time it ought to pass. Now, suppose we take our places in it, and ride as far as Piccadilly."

"With all my heart."

"But do you think of the risk?"

"Never mind that."

"You are but fresh out of Newgate yet, recollect, and your name serves to fill every one's mouth. It would be rather awkward if we were to get into the coach and be recognised."

"So it would; but I think there will not be much danger myself."

"Why not?"

"Because the passengers, for the most part, will be people coming from a distance in the country, and they will not be likely to know much about my personal appearance."

"Well, there is something in that."

"The chief thing I am afraid of is, that if the coach does come by, there will not be a chance of our having a ride."

"How do you mean?"

"It will most likely be full."

"Oh! I don't know that. You see people are put down within short distances of London, so that there are vacant places."

"I hope there will be to-night."

"It is time the coach was here, but I can see nothing of it."

"Nor hear it."

"Walk on patiently."

"It may have gone."

"It may, but I hope not."

Just as he spoke, there arose upon the night air the clear ringing tones of the guard's horn, which he blew from time to time, in order that there should be no one on the road ignorant of the approach of the coach.

All smaller vehicles had to make way for it, for the ponderous machine, once in motion, was not easily turned aside or stopped.

"It's all right, Jack," said Blueskin; "here it comes."

Our two friends stood on one side, and waited anxiously for it to come up.

When it was some thirty yards from them, they began to shout, in order to attract the attention of the driver and the guard.

Their cries were heard, and the coach stopped.

"We want to go to London," said Blueskin, "if you have got a couple of seats vacant."

"All right, gemmen," said the guard, dismounting from his perch behind. "Just room for two inside, if that will do."

"First-rate," said Blueskin,

The coach-door was opened and our friends entered.

The passengers little thought who there was getting in to sit down beside them.

The door was shut.

The guard resumed his seat.

The driver cracked his whip, and off rolled the coach again.

The interior of the coach was only lighted by an oil lamp, which at the best of times only gave out a feeble illumination, but now it stood sadly in want of trimming, and burned with a greatly diminished brightness, while part of the glass was rendered quite opaque with smoke.

This was a state of things, however, which, though probably disagreeable to the other passengers, suited our two friends exceedingly well, since they had all the better chance of escaping observation.

The stopping of the coach roused all the passengers

from the real or affected sleep into which they had fallen, and they gazed with listless curiosity at the new arrivals.

Accustomed as they were to a certain extent to the obscurity of the coach, they were able to see our friends pretty well, but it did not seem as though any one saw in their appearance anything suspicious or remarkable.

But they all seemed thoroughly awake.

"Are we far from London now, sir?" asked a clerical-looking personage, who sat next to the door, addressing himself to Blueskin.

"Not far, sir," replied our friend, without any reluctance or hesitation.

"About how far should you think, sir?"

"We shall reach Kilburn in a few minutes, and that, as I dare say you know, is a village about three miles from London."

"Thank you."

The conversation dropped.

Jack and Blueskin looked about them.

Besides the clerical gentleman we have incidentally alluded to, there were in the coach three other persons.

Two of these were females.

One had about her that nameless and indescribable something which proclaims the old maid.

The other was a young girl about nineteen years of age.

As for the one other passenger who remains undescribed, he was a man rather tall and stout, and attired in the very height of fashion.

He leaned back in the coach, with an assumed aristocratic air, and eyed the new comers superciliously.

"Pon honour," said this individual, in an affected drawing tone of voice, addressing the young lady alluded to. "Pon honour. Very extraordinary, indeed! I quite expected we should have been attacked by highwaymen before we got to the end of our journey; but it don't look much like it, I confess."

"La! sir," said the old maid, "pray don't talk about highwaymen—pray don't. It makes me all in a dither."

"All in what, ma'am?"

"Miss, sir, if you please."

"Oh! indeed. 'Pon honour. Very extraordinary," were the ejaculations uttered by the coxcombical-looking personage.

"Have you ever been stopped by highwaymen, sir?"

"I should rather think so, indeed. Good that. 'Pon honour. Very extraordinary."

This was rather an ambiguous reply, and might mean anything or nothing.

But Jack, who found it a relief to get rid of his own thoughts, came to a tolerable correct idea of the character of this person.

He determined to get something out of him, if he could.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, politely, "but the question that young lady asked you rather interests me."

"Does it, indeed. 'Pon honour."

"It does, sir. Was I right in understanding you to say that you had been robbed by highwaymen?"

"Yes, rather—at least, not robbed. 'Pon honour—not robbed—stopped, you know. 'Pon honour, I should like to see the highwayman that would rob me."

"Indeed, sir."

"Yes; why, if you'll believe me, sir—and I tell you this in confidence—without the slightest exception, highwaymen are the greatest cowards on the face of the earth."

"Is it possible," said Jack.

"Yes—'pon honour. Just show them a firm face, and they will run away—'pon honour, run away."

"You quite surprise me, sir."

"'Pon honour; very extraordinary."

"Would it be troubling you too much to give some account of your stoppage by highwaymen?"

"'Pon honour—which one?"

"Which one, sir?"

"Yes; which stoppage do you mean?"

"The one you mentioned just now."

"Oh! yes; 'pon honour. But I have been stopped so many times that I could not think for a moment which time you meant."

"I mean any one, sir. Perhaps you would give us the most remarkable one."

"'Pon honour; very extraordinary; but they were all most remarkable."

"You interest me more and more, sir; but if, as you say, they were all most remarkable, you will not have the trouble of making a selection."

"'Pon honour, no."

"Perhaps you would not mind favouring me with the first that comes to your recollection?"

"'Pon honour; no. I recollect"—

"No, no; please to don't," said the old maid, whose phraseology seemed as peculiar as her personal appearance; "I declare I am all of a dither."

"All of a what, ma'am?" asked the fop again.

"Miss, sir, if you please."

"'Pon honour; ten thousand pardons. Very extraordinary."

And here the subject would have dropped, but Jack determined to persevere.

"I am sorry to trouble you so much," he said, after a pause, "but, really, I feel so curious that"—

"'Pon honour, yes. I was going to tell you. Very extraordinary."

"The encounter, sir?"

"Yes, 'pon honour. Did you ever happen to hear of Jack Sheppard?"

"I have heard something of him," said Jack, coolly. "He's a most audacious chap, is he not? I mean the one who has broken twice out of Newgate."

"Pho!—pho! my dear sir, 'pon honour. You don't mean to say that you are a believer in that little fiction, are you?"

"To which little fiction do you allude, sir?"

"'Pon honour. Very extraordinary. I mean the fiction of Jack Sheppard being a brave chap, and having broken twice out of Newgate."

"I must confess, sir, that until you spoke, I was under the impression that these fictions were reality."

"Very extraordinary, 'pon honour. All a fiction. Why, Jack Sheppard never broke out of Newgate at all."

"Indeed," said Jack, "then I must have been sadly misinformed."

"There are more besides yourself, sir; but I happen to be in possession of the facts of the case."

"May I inquire what they are?"

"'Pon honour. Very extraordinary. Jack Sheppard and the governor of Newgate"—

"Yes—yes."

"'Pon honour. Very extraordinary. But they are firm friends, leagued together, and work into each other's hands."

"Can it be possible?"

"'Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary."

"Very extraordinary, sir, indeed. But the best of all understandings exists between the governor and Jack Sheppard."

"Do you know the nature of that understanding, sir?"

"'Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary."

"Is it indeed, sir?"

"'Pon honour. I tell it you in confidence. Jack Sheppard pays the governor of Newgate a certain sum of money every month, and so he is allowed to walk in and out of Newgate whenever he likes."

"It's really the most extraordinary thing that ever I heard of."

CHAPTER CCXVI.

JACK SHEPPARD HAS RATHER AN AMUSING ADVENTURE WITH THE BOASTING TRAVELLER IN THE COACH.

"'Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. Mind you, I tell you this in confidence. If it was known, why, of course, the governor of Newgate would lose his situation."

"Of course he would, sir, as you say."

"'Pon honour, yes. So it does not matter for being taken prisoner one bit. By virtue of the arrangement I have mentioned, Jack Sheppard can walk out of Newgate whenever he pleases."

"How awful!" said the old maid. "If you'll believe me, sir, when I think of him and his doings I go all of a dither."

"All of a what, ma'am?"

"Miss, sir, if you please."

"'Pon honour, yes. Ten thousand pardons! Very extraordinary."

Neither Jack nor Blueskin could refrain from smiling at this ridiculous and ludicrous scene.

But Jack was determined not to quit the subject.

"As you have remarked, sir," he said, "it is really very extraordinary, but something has continually interrupted you in the little anecdote you were kind enough to promise to give me."

"'Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary, but is always the case; somebody interrupts me, and so I never finish what I begin."

"Just so, sir; but we will endeavour not to interrupt you this time. You began talking about Jack Sheppard, if my memory serves me rightly, as though he was the person who stopped you on the highway, when you broke off to tell me the extraordinary arrangement he had made with the governor of Newgate."

"'Pon honour, yes."

"I should think that circumstance exempts him from the charge you made against highwaymen a little while ago."

"'Pon honour, sir, I forget. What?"

"You said that highwaymen were the most cowardly set of fellows in existence."

"'Pon honour, sir; very extraordinary—but I assure you they are. I think I told you that in confidence, sir, did I not?"

"You did, sir."

"'Pon honour: yes."

"But since Jack Sheppard feels that he has nothing to dread from capture that makes him an exception to the rest."

"'Pon honour; do you mean being a coward?"

"Yes, sir; I should think, under such advantageous circumstances, he must be brave."

"'Pon honour, sir; very extraordinary. But he is positively the greatest coward of the lot."

"What, Jack Sheppard?"

"'Pon honour; yes. I tell you in confidence, but he is the greatest coward of the lot."

"How do you account for that sir?"

"'Pon honour, sir, I don't know. Very extraordinary, but I was going to tell you"

"A little anecdote of your encounter with highwaymen?"

"On! pray don't use that horrid word," interposed the old maid again; "you don't know how it sends me all of a dither."

"'Pon honour, ma'am."

"Miss, sir."

"Very extraordinary; 'pon honour, miss, but would you oblige me by telling me what you mean by being all of a dither."

"Does that matter to you, sir?"

"'Pon honour; yes. Very extraordinary, but for the last half hour I have been trying to tell this young gentleman an anecdote, when, through your being in a dither, I have not done so yet. Now, 'pon honour, very extraordinary, you know, but would you tell me what is a dither?"

"A dither, sir?"

"Yes, a dither."

"A dither, sir, is a sort of a—kind of a—you know what I mean."

"'Pon honour, ma'am"—

"Miss, sir."

"A million pardons, miss; I don't know what you mean; I only wish I did. What is a dither?"

"A dither is a—a—a—a"—

"Yes—yes."

"A dither."

"Oh! a dither, is a dither."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh! indeed. 'Pon honour. Very extraordinary."

"I must beg your pardon for persevering, but all these provoking interruptions have inflamed my curiosity to a most incredible extent, and, therefore I do hope, sir, you will not allow your attention to be diverted by any interruption, but tell me the particulars at once."

"'Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. But, in confidence, if you'll believe me, I almost forget what I was going to say. Oh! I know; it was about Jack Sheppard."

"Yes, sir. I believe you said that highwaymen were

the greatest cowards on earth, and Jack Sheppard was the greatest coward among highwaymen."

"Pon honour, yes."

"And you were going to give me an instance of his cowardice."

"Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. I recollect now quite well. I do hope no one will interrupt me."

"Proceed, sir, if you please."

"Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. But about two months ago I was coming from Uxbridge."

"It was night, sir, I presume."

"Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. But I had been to a party, and was coming home. I was mounted on a most magnificent bay horse, sir. 'Pon honour, magnificent. I gave three hundred guineas for him,' 'pon honour. Well, sir. Very extraordinary. But I was mounted on this magnificent bay horse, coming home from a party I had been to at Edgware."

"You said Uxbridge, sir."

"Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. But I meant Uxbridge when I said Edgware. It was a *lapsus lingue*, sir. Talking of *lapsus lingue*, reminds me that—"

"Yes—yes; but what happened as you were coming home from the party at Uxbridge."

"Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. But when I had got about half-way home at least a dozen men, all mounted and armed, rode out suddenly from the shadow of the hedge row and surrounded me."

The old maid uttered a faint scream.

"A dozen men," said Jack.

"Pon honour, yes. 'Your money or your life!' cried one. 'Don't dally with me, I am Jack Sheppard! Your money or your life!'"

"It was Jack Sheppard who said that?"

"Pon honour, yes."

"And he was supported by eleven men?"

"Pon honour, yes. Eleven men, at the very least."

"And pray, sir, what did you do, then, sir?"

"Pon honour. Very extraordinary, but I knew what cowards this Jack Sheppard and all other highwaymen were, so what do you think I did?"

"Really, sir, I am unable to say."

"Pon honour. Mind, in confidence, I'll tell you. As soon as I found who they were, I determined to show fight, when I all at once recollected that I had only got one pistol with me, and that was unloaded."

"Very awkward that, sir."

"Pon honour, no."

"No!"

"No, for, very extraordinary, I knew what cowards the fellows were."

"What did you do, sir?"

"Pon honour, sir. I drew this empty pistol, and, very extraordinary, never put it on full-cock, and cried, 'Turn, you villains, and fly, or I will be the death of every one of you!'"

"That was a very valorous speech, sir, and did you great credit. At any rate, it shows that you were not a coward."

"Pon honour, no."

"What did the highwaymen do?"

"Very extraordinary. But no sooner did I produce the pistol, and speak in the manner I told you, than seeing my determined manner, they turned and fled."

"What, all the twelve?"

"Pon honour, yes. Very extraordinary. All the twelve."

"They must have been cowards for a dozen of them to fly from one man. Did not Jack Sheppard make any defence?"

"Pon honour, no. Very extraordinary, but I believe he was the first to turn and fly."

"No—no."

"Pon honour. He was the greatest coward of all the lot, as I told you."

"So you said, sir."

"Very extraordinary."

"I should think it was an extraordinary sight, sir?"

"Pon honour, yes. One man chasing twelve."

"Then did you chase them when they turned and fled?"

"Pon honour, yes. There was I—one man—with an unloaded pistol, chasing them."

"And they made no effort to attack you?"

"Pon honour, no. They never thought of such a thing. Very extraordinary. But I made up my mind I would drive them all to Newgate like a flock of sheep."

"Did you indeed, sir?"

"Pon honour, yes."

"And how did you succeed in your attempt?"

"Very extraordinary. I'll tell you; but mind it's in confidence. Of course we were in the country, twenty miles from town, so I had a long job before me."

"Excuse me, sir, but didn't you say at first that the attack was made upon you when you were about half-way between London and Uxbridge?"

"Pon honour; yes. Very extraordinary."

"So I think, indeed, if Uxbridge is forty miles from London."

"Pon honour, yes; but that is an immaterial point in the story."

"No, no."

"Pon honour, yes; I tell you, I was chasing these twelve highwaymen along the high-road to Newgate, and every one of the knaves were nearly frightened out of their wits, when—"

At this moment the coach stopped with a sudden jerk, and the trampling of horses' feet ensued.

The boasting fop looked rather agast; and when Jack said, "I'll wager my life that is Jack Sheppard who has stopped the coach!" he uttered a howl of dismay, while he made a frantic effort to get under one of the seats.

He dived down just where the old maid sat who was all in a dither.

In a second all that could be seen of him were his legs, which stuck out most ridiculously from underneath her petticoats.

CHAPTER CCXVII.

JONATHAN WILD, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF QUILT ARNOLD PERFORMS A VERY DISAGREEABLE BUT NECESSARY DUTY.

CURSING Jack Sheppard—cursing Blueskin—cursing himself—and cursing all the world, Jonathan Wild rode up to the door of his own house in Newgate-street.

The night was young yet, and many hours would have to elapse before dawn came, but he, nevertheless, for a time relinquished his search for those he so much wished to see the end of.

But on that occasion he found it would answer his purpose better not to waste time in searching for the two objects of his hate, but to wait until he heard of them.

Very long he felt sure it would not be before some tidings were brought him of their doings.

Now, he argued, they were no doubt safely hidden, where, on a dark night, he would stand no chance whatever of finding them.

Little did he imagine how far he was off the truth.

Little did he think that so bold a plan would occur to them as to make their way with all speed to his warehouse in the Horseferry, Westminster, and despoil it of its precious and valuable contents.

He threw himself off his reeking steed, and dismissed those who had so far aided him in the night's proceedings.

But though he dismissed his men, Jonathan's work for the night was by no means over.

He had a disagreeable task to perform, but it was a compulsory one.

It was to bury his mistress, Mary Milliner.

Some days had elapsed since her mysterious death; and as he had said, when speaking that evening to Quilt Arnold upon the subject, ever since the escape of Jack Sheppard his thoughts had been so much engrossed that he had forgotten all about her.

Quilt Arnold was now quite in Jonathan's confidence, and in every respect his head man, occupying about the same position as Blueskin did when we first introduced him to the reader at the commencement of this narrative.

Wilkinson was on the lock that night, and of course heard the trampling of hoofs which accompanied Wild's arrival.

He flung open the door, and allowed his imperious master to enter.

"Where's Quilt?" was Jonathan's first question.

"Upstairs, Mr. Wild."

The thief-taker made no reply, but stalked along the hall and ascended the stairs.

He went into the room where he usually sat on the first floor.

But, before entering it, he called out for Quilt Arnold in a voice that shook the house.

There was a hurried trampling of heavy feet, and then some one knocked submissively at the door.

Jonathan just at that moment was engaged in drinking from a bottle of brandy which he had taken off the table.

Removing it, however, from his lips he called out—

"Come in."

Quilt obeyed.

"What is it, Mr. Wild, if you please," he asked, as he stood on the threshold with the knob of the door in his hand.

"Come in and sit down, Quilt. I want to speak to you."

Quilt sat down without a word, and waited in patience to hear what would be said to him.

"I shall want your assistance to-night."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"You remember what I was saying to you?"

"About Mary Milliner?"

"Yes."

"What am I to do, sir?"

"Have you been up in the room to look at her?"

"No, sir."

"Then, how do you know she is there?"

"That's where she was put, Mr. Wild, and she was past moving."

"She must be buried."

"So you said, sir."

"You and I will do it."

"Me, sir?" said Quilt, not altogether relishing the idea, for since the little affair in the vaults of Tottenham Church, he had a mortal repugnance to dead bodies.

"Yes, you. I'll tell you how it is to be done."

"Yes, sir."

"You must get a light cart, and a horse, and a sack."

"A sack."

"Yes, a sack to put the body in, Quilt."

"Oh! lor, Mr. Wild."

"You had better go and order the horse and cart at once."

"What time must it be at the door?"

"In half-an-hour."

"Very well, sir."

"Then come back to me, and I will give you further instructions."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

Quilt Arnold left the room by no means well pleased with the night's work he had in prospect.

But it was more than his life was worth to make the slightest demur, so, in spite of his unwillingness, he went.

While he was gone, Jonathan seated himself in a chair by the fireside.

He drew the table towards him, and took another sip at the brandy.

Then he lighted his pipe, and fell into a musing fit.

How many different thoughts swept through the brain of the thief-taker it would be hard indeed to say. He had a great many things on his mind, each of which required his immediate attention.

He thought deeply, and while so busily engaged the time passed rapidly.

He was aroused by a faint tapping at the door, which announced Quilt Arnold's return.

"Come in."

"The horse and cart will be at the door in half-an-hour, Mr. Wild."

"Very well. Where's the sack?"

"On the landing outside."

"Is it a large one?"

"The largest I could get, Mr. Wild."

"Have you got a lantern?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we are provided."

"Shall you require anything more?"

"I think not."

"Very well, sir."

"You have not got a very pleasant job before you, Quilt."

"No, Mr. Wild."

"However, take a drop of brandy. Don't be afraid, that will put you all right."

Quilt did not need a second bidding to do this.

To be sure, while he was out he called at a public-house and had a draw on his own account, but he could do with a little more.

Jonathan rose to his feet and put down his pipe.

Quilt put down the brandy.

"Now," said the former, "take your lantern and the sack, and go upstairs. I will follow."

Quilt led the way.

He had left his dark lantern on the broad part of the balustrade, and the sack was lying on the ground close to it, rolled up into a very small compass.

These he took in his hand, and went upstairs to the door of the room in which the mortal remains of the defunct Mary Milliner lay.

Steggs was on the landing carefully watching at his post, and Jonathan stopped a moment to question him.

But he elicited only the customary reply that all was right, and that he had seen nothing to account for the awful and mysterious death of Wild's mistress.

Jonathan did not think proper to say anything to Steggs respecting the business which had brought him up there at that late hour of the night, and he (Steggs) watched his actions with considerable uneasiness.

But he soon found he had nothing whatever to alarm himself about.

Quilt Arnold had got the key of the chamber of death, and in spite of the factitious vigour which his recent fiery potations gave him, his hand shook perceptibly when he tried to introduce the key into the lock.

With an effort, however, he controlled himself, and turned the key.

He threw open the door.

The moment he did so both the senses of himself and his master, who stood close behind him, were assailed by that disagreeable and unmistakable odour which decomposing flesh always emits.

So powerful, too, was it, that they had to draw back a step, to allow the pure air upon the landing (for such, by comparison, it seemed to be) to mingle with the foul atmosphere within the chamber.

"I am afraid we have let the job go a little too long, Quilt," said Wild.

"She smells awful, sir."

"Pah! Don't talk about it. We have got a disagreeable job to do, and we must do it. It's no good to turn sick. Screw up your courage, Quilt. The sooner we get it over the better."

Although Quilt Arnold could not help seeing the force of this reasoning, still it did not reconcile him any the more to the task he had to do.

But he knew it had to be done, so, holding the sack in his left hand, and the lantern in his right, he entered.

Jonathan followed him closely.

When Mary Milliner had been carried up stairs, and put in the room, the men had shown her very little ceremony.

They put her down all in a heap, just as they held her, on the floor inside the room.

There she lay still, and had not Quilt Arnold known just where she was, he would inevitably have tumbled over her.

But he cautioned Wild, and stepped aside.

The thief-taker cast one glance upon the corpse, and then turned away with a shudder of horror.

We shall not attempt in any way to describe the awful and revolting appearance which the dead body presented.

We should only disgust the reader.

But the worst part of the work had to be done.

It was a kind of retribution for Wild to have so much trouble with her dead body—a kind of punishment for his own horrible brutality.

Quilt Arnold put the lantern on the floor, and unrolled the sack.

"You will have to help me put her in," he said. "I can't do it all myself, Mr. Wild."

"All right, I'll help you."

With a good deal of trouble, and by their united exertions, the body was at last got into the sack.



[THE ENCOUNTER ON THE HOUSETOPS.]

They accomplished the feat by putting the mouth of the sack over her head, and drawing it down over the whole of her body.

Then, with a sigh of satisfaction, Quilt tied up the mouth with a piece of strong twine.

"Carry her down stairs, Quilt," said Wild; "thank goodness, the worst part of the job is over. Come on carefully. I will hold the light."

Quilt hoisted the body upon his back, and slowly staggered out of the room across the landing and down the stairs after his master.

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND QUILT ARNOLD BURY THE BODY OF MARY MILLINER.

THE body of Mary Milliner was no inconsiderable weight, so when he got to the landing on the first-floor, Quilt Arnold was fain to set his burden against the wall and rest himself a little.

"Come and have a drop more brandy, Quilt," said Wild, "and that will take the taste out of your mouth."

"She smells awful, Mr. Wild."

"She does; but come inside and shut the door. We will have some brandy together till the cart comes."

"I should think the half-hour must be up, Mr. Wild."

"It must be very nearly. But we shall hear it when it stops."

"So we shall, sir."

Wild drank deeply of the brandy on the table, and then passed the bottle to his lieutenant.

"Quilt," said Wild, after a moment's pause, "we ought to get all the men out of the way. I don't want this job to get wind, or there will be no end of fuss made about it."

"I think there's only Wilkinson downstairs, sir, and he's on the lock."

"Wilkinson, Wilkinson," said Wild, musingly, "I should think we could trust him."

"Yes, Mr. Wild, I think so too."

"Then go downstairs, and see if there is any one else about. If there is not, it does not matter."

Quilt departed on this errand, and soon returned to say that there was no one downstairs but Wilkinson.

This satisfied Wild, and he renewed his attentions to the brandy, permitting Quilt to follow his example.

At this moment there was the clattering of horses' hoofs, and the rumbling of wheels in the street outside.

"That's the cart," said Quilt.

"Run down, then, and send whoever has brought it about his business."

"Yes, Mr Wild."

"We must have no prying eyes upon us."

"I understand, sir. I'll be back again directly."

And Quilt was as good as his word.

"The coast is all clear now, sir."

"Very good. Quilt!"

"Yes, sir."

"We have forgotten something now."

"What is that, Mr. Wild?"

"A spade."

"Oh! ah! yes. We shall want a spade."

"Of course we shall. Where shall you find one?"

"That is more than I can tell you, sir."

"You must find one, then."

Quilt set off upon this errand, and was fortunate enough, after a few minutes' search, to find the article he wanted in the corridor from which the cells opened.

This he placed in the cart, and then went upstairs to tell his master.

Jonathan was quite ready.

Once more, then, did Quilt take up the sack upon his back, and stagger downstairs.

Along the passage and out into the street they went.

Wilkinson did not know what was being carried out, and Wild did not allow him a chance of ascertaining, for as soon as Quilt got through the door, he stood at it and pulled it shut after him.

He then lent his assistance to his lieutenant to lift the body into the cart, and as this had a flap at the back, it was done with tolerable ease.

Then both got into the cart.

Jonathan took the reins.

The horse started off at a rapid speed, and then, for the first time, Jonathan Wild began to wonder where he should bury the body.

But he thought he should have plenty of time to think as he went along, so he took his course down Holborn.

He wanted to bury her in some place where her remains would never again see the light of day.

What place was best adapted for such a purpose was more than he could say.

But when he came to the corner of Gray's Inn-lane, he turned up that dark and dismal thoroughfare.

"I will ask Quilt's advice," he said. "Perhaps he will be able to give me a good hint."

"Quilt!" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"I want to bury the body, Quilt," he said, "in some safe place, where no one will ever find it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Now where should you think a likely spot?"

"I am sure I don't know, Mr. Wild; I thought you had made up your mind."

"No, no, I have not; I thought there would be plenty of time to do that after we started."

"We are in Gray's Inn-lane, are we not sir?"

"Yes."

"If you turn to the right a little, Mr. Wild, we shall come to the village of St. Pancras. There is an old church there, sir."

"I know there is."

"It stands in a very lonely position, indeed. Suppose we were to bury her in the churchyard?"

"It is not a bad thought, Quilt, but I am afraid the church you speak of is rather too near London."

"It is rather near."

"But I like the idea of burying her in a churchyard, if we could find some out-of-the-way spot."

"It would be better, sir; and if we filled the grave up carefully, no one would be any the wiser."

"Very true; and now I come to think of it, there is a

church about half-way between Kentish-town and High-gate-hill which will just answer our purpose."

"I know the church you mean," said Quilt; "it is a very old one, with a square tower, and covered with green stuff."

"That is it."

"It is far away from all houses, and half in ruins; I should think a better place could not be found."

"We will drive there, then, Quilt."

Jonathan, having come to this determination, struck the horse with the whip, and away they went at a rattling pace.

But when they passed the few cottages which stood near King's-cross, their way lay entirely through the country, until they came to the long, straggling village of Kentish-town.

Through this, keeping along the High-street, they went at full speed.

But there was no eye to see them.

The inhabitants of the little rural village had one and all long ago retired to rest.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when Jonathan reached his destination.

The church lay a little way back from the main road, and was surrounded with a low, moss-grown, wooden fence.

The square tower of the church was rather darker than the sky, so its outlines were clearly revealed upon it.

Jonathan stopped the cart in the high-road, just opposite the church.

But Quilt, whose knowledge of that neighbourhood was perfect, said—

"Mr. Wild! Mr. Wild!"

"Well?"

"Don't stop here, sir."

"Why not?"

"Drive a little further, and then you will come to a very narrow lane, which leads down to one of the gates opening into the churchyard."

"You know the place well, then?"

"Very well, indeed, Mr. Wild, for when I was a boy I lived here."

These last few words were spoken in a tone of voice which no one, not even Jonathan Wild, would have recognised as belonging to Quilt Arnold.

It is probable that the past came back to his mind with extraordinary vividity, and that he was reminded of what he was when he was a boy and what he was now.

But he quickly banished all such unpleasant reflections from his mind.

Jonathan saw the policy of leaving the high-road, so he again set the horse in motion, looking out all the time for the turning of which Quilt had spoken.

It was only a few yards further on.

He turned down it without hesitation, and halted in a minute or two afterwards at a little gate which led into the churchyard.

Quilt sprang out of the cart, and Jonathan followed his example.

They then took hold of the horse's head, and walked him close to the hedge, so that he could eat the soft green grass which grew rather plentifully about that spot.

The board at the back of the cart was next unfastened, and allowed to swing down upon its hinges.

Quilt took hold of the sack and drew it out, while Jonathan possessed himself of the spade.

The body of poor Mary Milliner fell with a heavy dab to the ground, for the weight was more than Quilt could manage by himself.

Jonathan, however, put down the spade, and came to his assistance.

By their united exertions she was carried to the gate. But it was fastened.

They did not attempt to open it, but fairly swung the body over it into the churchyard, or rather upon the well-trod gravel path leading to it.

Quilt then fetched the spade.

Their next proceeding was to climb over the gate themselves.

But this was easily enough done, and picking up the sack, they carried it to a remote corner of the churchyard, to which Quilt Arnold led the way.

All around was positively as still as death.

So still, indeed, as to become painful, and the thief-taker and his accomplice both wished that they could hear some sound to indicate the presence of some other living creature.

On reaching the remote corner of the churchyard referred to, they deposited their burden.

It was quite a relief to Quilt when Wild said—

"Light the lantern."

He immediately obeyed.

It was a dark lantern, and, by his master's orders, he only partially withdrew the slide, lest its light should attract attention to them.

Jonathan sat down on a contiguous tombstone, and held the lantern in his hand, directing the whole of its rays upon one spot, while Quilt Arnold began very diligently to turn up the earth.

"Dig deep," said Jonathan, "and as quickly as you are able, because every moment we stay increases our risk of detection. When you are tired and can dig no longer, I will help while you rest."

Quilt by no means wished to be discovered in what he was about, so he set to work in good earnest, and soon had a large mound of earth and a deep hole.

But digging is hard work to those who are not accustomed to it, and Arnold was soon obliged to give in.

Then he held the light while Jonathan jumped into the grave, and turned out the earth in incredible quantities.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

RECORDS THE HORRIBLE SCENE WHICH TOOK PLACE IN THE GRAVEYARD OF THE RUINED CHURCH.

JONATHAN set about his task too vigorously at first to be able to keep it up long.

Still, in a very little while, he had done a great deal.

But his strength suddenly left him, and he was obliged to jump out of the grave to allow Quilt Arnold to finish the task.

That worthy was tolerably refreshed by the short rest he had had, and he resumed his work steadily as before.

At the expiration of a quarter of an hour he had dug a hole some eight or nine feet in depth.

"Is that deep enough?" he asked.

"Go a little lower, Quilt; you may as well while you are about it. I want to bury her so deep that there won't be any risk of discovering her when they come to dig upon this spot to bury somebody else. Do you understand me?"

"All right, Mr. Wild," replied Quilt, and he went on with his arduous labour.

As he sat on the corner of a tombstone, holding the light, Jonathan had an ear to catch any sound.

But all was silent still, and he began to indulge in the hope that he should finish his disagreeable duty without interruption.

Once more Quilt asked the question whether the grave was deep enough, and this time he coupled it with the assertion that he could not dig it any deeper in consequence of the difficulty he had in throwing out the mould.

"Come out, then," replied Wild, "and let us get the job over as quickly as we can. I am tired of it."

"So am I, sir," said Quilt, as, not without some trouble, he scrambled out of the deep grave he had dug.

He straightened his back.

Jonathan put the lantern down just where he had been sitting—that is to say, upon the corner of the tombstone.

Then they once more stooped over the inert body of Jonathan's mistress.

Catching hold of the sack at all four corners, they staggered with it to the edge of the grave, and then, giving it one swing, allowed it to fall in.

It struck with a dull thud against the sides of the grave, and finally reached the bottom with a crash that caused a sickening sensation in the breasts of the thief-taker and Quilt as they heard it.

But at that moment their ears were assailed with a cry that made them forget all about the other.

That cry was uttered by a human voice.

"Help! help!" it said. "Murder! murder! help! They are robbing a dead body! Help! help! good people all! Arrest the villains! Murder! murder!"

These words were enough to terrify Jonathan Wild.

Although personally it might be said that he had nothing to fear, yet he did not wish to be mixed up in any way with the transaction, and he would have deputed the job altogether to other hands, only in that case his mind would not have been so much at rest as it would be if he had seen it done himself.

Looking through the gloom in the churchyard, he saw in the distance the figure of an old man, who was running rapidly.

The moment he caught sight of him he made up his mind what to do.

Quilt Arnold had taken the spade with the intention of hastily filling up the grave.

Jonathan snatched it with great rapidity from his hands, and then, heedless of the obstacles that were before him, he ran after the flying form.

It was wonderful to see how he jumped over the tombstones, which were placed very thickly together, and almost every time without sustaining the slightest injury.

But who it was that was flying before him to spread the alarm, must either have had fleetest running powers than Wild, or else, which was more likely, possessed a more intimate knowledge of the graveyard.

In spite of every effort, Jonathan could not overtake him, and he began to grow terribly apprehensive that he would get out of the churchyard, and running to the village, spread the alarm.

This dread made Jonathan double his endeavours.

At length, just before him, he could see the palings which formed the boundary of the churchyard, and the little gate in them.

The flying form, still uttering cries for help, made its way in a direct line to the gate.

He reached it.

But he had to stay a moment to undo the fastening.

That moment was fatal.

It allowed Jonathan to come up with him.

He was nervous and agitated, and could not find the latch.

At last his hand rested upon it.

Then he lifted it.

Another second, and he would have been fairly out into the lane.

But Jonathan was too close behind him.

He saw the person he was chasing fumbling at the gate.

He grasped the handle of the spade tightly with both hands.

He raised it above his head.

Then, just at the very moment when the man, having lifted the latch, was about to pass through, he brought it down with all the force he could impart to it.

His aim was accurate.

The sharp edge of the heavy implement caught the man fairly on the top of the head.

He fell with a gasping sob, with as much suddenness as if he had been struck down with lightning.

Had there been any one to see the countenance of the thief-taker at that moment, it would be seen to be distorted with one of his hideous grins.

That was because he had been successful.

The man he had so brutally and ruthlessly struck down lay just where he had fallen, and exhibited no signs whatever of returning animation.

And now Quilt Arnold, holding the lantern with an unsteady grasp, appeared upon the scene.

He had followed his master, picking his way among the gravestones carefully.

His heart turned sick, callous as he was, when he saw the brutal murder committed.

But the first words Wild uttered showed not the least signs of pity or remorse.

"Ha—ha! Quilt, there he is; I thought I should have him! Lend me the light. Ah! just as I thought; he is as dead as a nut."

Jonathan had taken the lantern, and when he looked at the prostrate form, he saw that the head had been clove in two with the edge of the spade, and the brains scattered around.

"Curse him!" growled the thief-taker, in a voice of extreme bitterness. "Curse him! I have caught him, to be sure, but we shall have no end of extra trouble. Look, there is a pool of blood."

"Lend me the lantern," said Quilt, suddenly, as he

caught a transient glimpse of the face of the murdered man.

"What for?"

"As I told you, I lived about these parts when I was a boy—and—perhaps I may know him. Lend me the light, I say."

There was a strange, wild incoherence in Quilt's manner that awed Wild, and he gave him the lantern without further question.

The moment he had it in his grasp he hurried forward with staggering step, and directed the rays of the lantern upon the countenance of the dead.

A horrible groan came from his lips as he caught sight of it, and he sunk down in a moment beside the corpse.

Jonathan was full of astonishment and somewhat terrified, but he would not allow that to be visible, so he assumed an angry air.

Quilt was at first ignorant of the import of the words which Jonathan addressed to him, but when he did catch their meaning, he sprang suddenly to his feet and caught the thief-taker by the throat.

"Villain! villain! monstrous villain!" he shrieked. "Did I come here to-night for this? But you shall pay for what you have done with your own life!"

Surprise at the sudden attack for a moment made Wild incapable of defending himself, but recovering the use of his senses, he, in his turn, grasped Quilt Arnold by the throat, and a desperate struggle ensued.

In this the latter proved no match for his master.

Jonathan had him down in a moment, with his knee upon his chest.

"Are you mad?" he asked, with real anger. "What do you mean? What is the matter with you? Speak, or this moment is your last!"

"I will, Mr. Wild," said Quilt, his excitement subsiding. "I took the lantern to look in the face of the man you had killed. I had a presentiment that I should know it, and so I did. Jonathan Wild! I know that face. It was my father!"

Jonathan himself was too much surprised to reply for a moment, and then all he could say when he did reply was to repeat the words—

"Your father?"

"Yes. He was the sexton to this church."

"Well, well, Quilt; it can't be helped now. It would never have done for him to have spread the alarm all over the village. Besides, I didn't know it was him. It was an unlucky chance."

"He is quite dead," said Quilt, for Jonathan having released him, he had gone back to the body. "He is quite dead."

"It is a most unlucky affair, altogether," said Wild. "It will never do to leave him where he is. We must bury him along with Mary Milliner, and be off. Why, if this was found out, we should both be tucked up, as sure as fate."

Quilt Arnold, who was at first much agitated, was now quite calm and self-possessed, or at all events appeared to be so. How much such behaviour was assumed none could tell. Jonathan Wild had him in his power, and he knew it.

At the command of his master he assisted to carry the body of his father to his unholy grave, and cast him in.

Quilt's heart, hard as it was, smote him.

But Jonathan produced his brandy-flask, and handed it to him.

He drank heartily, and so did Wild, after which they set about ending their labour.

The earth was shovelled in, and pressed down as hard as possible with their feet.

Then the turf was carefully placed over it, and no traces remained of the deed which had been done, with the exception of a mound of soil.

This, however, they loaded with some trouble into the cart, and disposed of at a distance.

The blood stains were removed, and everything done to prevent suspicion of what had occurred, and Jonathan drove back to London just as the day was beginning to dawn.

CHAPTER CCXX.

IN WHICH THE LUDICROUS ADVENTURE WITH THE BOASTING TRAVELLER IS BROUGHT TO A CONCLUSION.

BOTH Jack Sheppard and Blueskin broke out into a hearty laugh when they saw the effect which the mere mention of Jack Sheppard's name, and the bare probability of his having stopped the coach, produced upon the boasting traveller.

Now, most of those in the coach knew that it had stopped from the most natural of all causes.

It had reached its destination, and that is why Jack spoke as he did.

But the "Very extraordinary, 'pon honour" gentleman was quite oblivious of this, and he continued his frantic exertions to get underneath the seat, to the great dismay of the old maid, who, if ever she was in her life, must now be in a "dither."

The guard of the coach now came to the door and opened it, and the passengers alighted.

It was then, and not till then, that Mr. "'Pon honour" discovered that he had nothing whatever to fear, and looking very sheepish, he crawled out of the vehicle, and was off out of sight in a moment in the darkness.

But Jack and Blueskin had both made up their minds that he should not escape them, so they darted off after him.

The valorous gentleman slackened his speed before he got very far, and then our two friends overtook him.

Very skillfully they got one on each side of his person.

"Ha! sir," said Jack, "I see you are going the same way as we are. Come along. We shall be glad of your company."

"'Pon honour" —

"Just so, sir. You will forgive me for my little joke at your expense, won't you?"

"Very extraordinary. But did you think I was afraid?"

"Oh! no."

"'Pon honour; but just under the seat was my port-mantle, and in that I had a brace of pistols. I was trying to get them out, and if Jack Sheppard had stopped the coach I would have peppered him."

"Oh! indeed. Now I trust you will forgive me for making such a mistake, but I really thought you were frightened, and were trying to hide yourself."

"'Pon honour, no; very extraordinary."

"A very extraordinary mistake for me to make. But still I think London streets are very unsafe after dark; and if you are going, our way I think your company would be a protection."

"'Pon honour, yes; very extraordinary, but I am going to Charing-cross."

"And we are going to Westminster, so we shall have the pleasure of your company for half the distance, at least."

"'Pon honour, yes; I shall be very glad to protect you, I am sure. As I told you before, highwaymen are the greatest cowards, and if it had only been Jack Sheppard who had stopped the coach I would have finished him."

"So you said, sir; this way, if you please—round the corner to the right."

"But that is not the way to Charing-cross."

"Oh! yes; we shall save a good deal of ground, you will find, by going this way."

The valorous gentleman did not like to say nay to those who were with him, so they turned the corner.

It was into a very narrow, dark, and suspicious-looking street leading out of Piccadilly into which they turned.

The hour was a late—or rather, to speak more correctly, an early one—still the night was far from gone, and no one scarcely was abroad.

Just as they turned into this street, Blueskin took up the conversation.

"I dare say, sir, considering the government offers a rather large reward for the apprehension of Jack Sheppard, that you would be glad to come across him."

"'Pon honour, yes; if you'll believe me, sir, very extraordinary, but the money just now would be very useful indeed, and there is nothing I should like so much as to meet with him."

"You would drive him before you, I presume, as far as Newgate?"

"Pon honour, yes."

"Then you have got the chance now," said Jack.

"Eh?"

"I say, if you want to see Jack Sheppard, you have got a chance."

In his fright, the boasting traveller forgot the customary ejaculations with which he interlarded what he said, and merely gasped—

"How? where?"

"Here. For I am Jack Sheppard!"

It is out of our power to describe the effect which these words had.

At first he stared at Jack with undisguised amazement, for he could not realize what he had just heard.

Then he uttered a howl, similar to the one to which he gave vent when in the coach.

His next attempt was to fly.

But Blueskin was on the watch for that, so he merely ran into his arms.

"One word," he said, in a stern voice, very different to the one in which he had previously spoken. "One word, or the least cry for help, and I will blow your brains out!"

This threat did not have to be repeated.

The valorous gentleman collapsed at once.

"Put your hand in my coat-pocket, Jack, and you will find a coil of thin rope."

The word rope seemed very suggestive to Mr. "Pon honour," and he uttered a groan.

But Blueskin's next words took a load off his mind.

"Tie him to this post, Jack, and then we will see what he is worth."

There was a post on the footpath close to where they stood, and it was to this that Blueskin alluded.

The traveller was quite helpless in his hands, and he placed him against the post, while Jack firmly bound him to it with the rope.

Their next proceeding was to search his pockets, but all they could find were some trifling toilette articles and some coppers.

At this the rage of our two friends can be imagined, though Jack from the first had formed a tolerably accurate idea of who he was, and how much he was worth.

"Villain!" said Blueskin, "is this all the money you have about you? Tell me the truth, or so sure as I speak, I will scatter your brains upon the pavement!"

"Pon honour, yes."

"Then what do you mean by talking about riding on a bay horse that you paid three hundred guineas for?"

The traveller made no reply.

"Who are you?" asked Blueskin, "tell me this moment."

The traveller hesitated.

"What is your name?"

"Pon honour, sir."

"That is not your name."

"Pon honour, no."

"Cease your foolery. What is your name, I say?"

"Peter Grig."

"Ha! ha!"

Neither Blueskin nor Jack could refrain from laughing at this ludicrous name.

"Is that your real name?" asked the former.

"Pon honour, yes."

"And what are you?"

"A professor."

"Professor of what? Answer me at once; don't keep me here waiting."

"Professor of the tonsorial art."

"Professor of the what art?"

"Tonsorial art."

"And what art is that?"

"In plain language?"

"Yes, of course, and without any 'pon honour or very extraordinary."

"Then the tonsorial art is the art of removing hirsute appendages from the face."

"What?"

"Why," said Jack, "I know what he means."

"What?"

"He is a barber."

"A barber?"

"Yes."

"Is that the truth?" he asked, in great disgust.

"It is so called in vulgar language?"

"Then do you mean to say you had the infernal impudence to sit in a stage coach and assume the airs you did, and talk in the manner you did, when you were only a barber?"

Mr Peter Grig said never a word.

"I'll tell you what you are," said Blueskin; "you are a liar and a coward, and which predominates is more than I can tell. But you shall suffer for your foolery. Here, Jack, just help me, and then we will be off."

"What are you going to do?"

"Just follow my example."

As he spoke, Blueskin whipped off the barber's hat, and then stooping down, took a handful of mud from the kennel, and plentifully bedaubed his face with it.

In this Jack willingly enough assisted.

Once the unfortunate barber opened his mouth, either to cry out for help or else to expostulate.

But Blueskin had a handful of unsavoury mud ready, and in it went.

"Come on, Jack," he said, "we will leave him now."

Accordingly they both hastened down the street, nor did they pause until they were some distance from the post to which the barber was tied.

"We have lost a great deal of time with him, Blue."

"We have, Jack."

"Did you ever know such a lying coward? I really thought when I was in the coach, and he told his 'extraordinary 'pon honour' story that I should burst."

"It was very rich. But if I had known, I should not have wasted so much time as I did. I made sure he would have something about him that would repay us for our trouble."

"Well I didn't, do you know. I fancied all the time the fellow would turn out to be something like he has. But we have not lost so much time. The night is young yet, and if he has done no more, he has afforded us some amusement, and chased away some unpleasant thoughts."

"Perhaps it is as well. But let us make the best of our time now. It will be late before we reach Westminster."

"So it will; but I cannot help fancying the time will be well chosen. Just before daybreak nearly everybody slumbers."

"So they do."

"How do you imagine we shall carry off the swag?"

"I shall get a horse and cart close by the Horseferry."

"Can you trust the people?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well, I shall leave that to you, but we shall be obliged to have something, for if I recollect right, all that I saw when I went there was heavy articles. I wonder whether we shall find a cartload of those little ingots of silver?"

CHAPTER CCXXI.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD MAKE A SUCCESSFUL ATTACK UPON WILD'S WAREHOUSE IN THE HORSEFERRY, WESTMINSTER.

"THAT is more than I can tell," said Blueskin, "for I have not been to the place since the time when I was there with you. But I hope we shall be well rewarded for our risk."

"They say the third time pays for all, Blue, and I hope the proverb will hold good in the present instance. It will be our third adventure to-night, and the two we have had have been unprofitable in the extreme."

"So they have. We are going to do a daring thing, Jack. If there is anything of value in the warehouse, you may trust to Wild for leaving it well guarded."

"Well, we are at Westminster now. Whereabouts are you going to find the horse and cart?"

"Close here; I think it is the next turning on our right hand."

"This one?"

"No, the next."

They reached this corner, and then turned down it.

Blueskin halted before a public-house, or rather before a gateway that adjoined it.

There was a bull-handle concealed in the door-post.

but Blueskin knew its exact situation, so he pulled it at once.

He had to wait a little while, however, before there was an answer.

Then a little gate made in the larger one was thrown open, and a man in the garb of an ostler appeared.

Blueskin spoke to him, and what he said appeared to be quite satisfactory, for this man withdrew, and in an incredibly short space of time had a horse and cart ready.

Our two friends got in, and drove off at a steady pace.

At length they came to the place of their destination.

They drew up, however, at some little distance from the warehouse.

Blueskin alighted, and hopped the horse with some links with which the ostler had provided him, so that the animal could not stray away from where he was left.

The reader will no doubt remember that in the thirtieth chapter of this narrative we gave a very particular account of Wild's warehouse in the Horseferry, Westminster.

But there will be no harm in our repeating that the place where the booty was stored was in a kind of vault beneath a shed in the yard belonging to a public-house.

The sign of this public-house was the "Ship and Rainbow," and the ostensible landlord of it a man named John Oaky, who, like most of those with whom the thief-taker had any dealings, was wholly in Wild's power.

He then kept the public-house in which business was carried on in a legitimate fashion, but to only a slight extent, though Wild did not grumble about that. In fact, he did not care how few came to the house, for fear something should be discovered.

Then Oaky did not care, because he only had trouble with his visitors, and he was not in any way dependent upon what he took for support.

And so, at the "Ship and Rainbow," there was very little done in the way of business.

On reaching the front of this house, Blueskin looked up at it, and saw that there was not the least glimmer of a light in any part.

"I think we shall find it all right," he said. "You see the chief security that Wild has for this place is its existence being a profound secret, and known only to about three persons."

"You mean besides himself."

"Just so."

"Then I trust we shall find something worth carrying off. Who is it keeps this public-house?"

"One of Wild's men, by name John Oaky, and who is entirely in his power. He could have him hanged just whenever he liked."

"Does he keep a dog?"

"I think not."

"How shall we get through the gate?"

It was the gate leading into the yard by the side of the public-house of which Jack spoke.

"There is only one way, I think."

"How is that?"

"You must climb over, as you are the lightest, and then let me in."

"But how is the gate fastened?"

"Only with a wooden bar, which goes straight across it."

"All right, then, I think I can manage that."

"Up you go, then."

"You are sure he does not keep a dog?"

"I don't think he does, but you had better keep a good look-out. I should not like to say for certain."

"Help me up, then."

Blueskin assisted Jack Sheppard to reach the top of the gate.

Here, however, Jack paused a moment, and looked down into the yard.

But all was quiet, and he could see nothing indicative of danger.

Accordingly, he lowered himself silently and carefully into the yard.

With great suddenness, however, on reaching the ground he turned his back to the gate, and stood in a attitude of defence.

This proved to be an unnecessary caution.

Finding there was nothing to dread at present, he hastily took down the wooden bar, and found, as Blueskin had said, that it was the only fastening the gate had,

with the exception of a couple of bolts which he easily withdrew.

The gate then swung open, and Blueskin entered.

He led the way across the yard to the door of the shed.

This he knew was locked, but from a pocket in the breast of his coat he produced a bunch of skeleton keys.

He felt these with his fingers one by one, and from being familiar with the proper key, he was able to tell which would answer his purpose.

He thrust one which he selected into the lock, which, no less to his gratification than Jack's, yielded.

They passed through into the shed as quickly as possible, and then Blueskin, removing the key from the outer side of the door, locked them in.

The darkness when he had done this was most intense.

Jack did not move, but stood just where he was when the door was closed.

Blueskin's next act was to produce from his pocket a dark lantern and some thieves' matches.

Let him be where he would, he always had the material for procuring a light somewhere about his person.

Even when he could have told for certain that he should have no occasion to make use of them, he always took them in his pocket.

The interior of the shed was now illumined by a faint blue light.

Then the flame from the match, having been communicated to the wick of the lantern, our friends were enabled to see about them.

As on the former occasion, the floor of the shed was littered with straw.

Going to one particular spot, however, Blueskin removed this straw, and then some flagstones were revealed.

His next act was to hand the lantern to Jack, while he felt in his pocket for some instrument that would serve to raise the stone which covered the top of the steps leading down into the warehouse.

A simple-looking housebreaking implement, looking something like a hook, did the business.

He fixed it into the crevice of the stone, and, exerting all his strength, pulled it up in the fashion of a trap-door.

Having done so much, both listened in order to ascertain whether any alarm had been given, and whether any sounds came from below.

But they seemed to have the place entirely to themselves, both within and without, above and below.

"It's all right, Jack, I do believe," said Blueskin, "and I don't think we shall have half the trouble I thought we should."

"Let us make haste, Blue. There is nothing to prevent our descending the steps at once, is there?"

"No; but let me go first, if you please."

"No, no."

"But I say yes."

"Why?"

"Because I know the way better than you do. Just descend after me carefully."

With this Blueskin went down the steps leading to the warehouse, with Jack close at his heels.

On reaching the bottom of the flight of steps, which were very few in number, they paused and listened again, but as they heard nothing, they felt themselves endowed with greater confidence, and were almost certain there was no one in the subterranean passage.

They now found themselves in a small vaulted chamber.

But its appearance was very different to what it was when Jack saw it before.

Then it was piled up with a large number of packages, all tied up and labelled.

There were several hundred of them at least there, but now there were scarcely any.

They ascertained this by Blueskin waving the light up and down.

"This is just what I feared, Jack," he said.

"What?"

"We have got into this place easily, but there will be nothing worth taking away."

"The devil!"

"Jonathan seems to have made a general move."

"Did he always keep a large stock of things here?"

"There used to be at times."

"How did he dispose of them?"

"In two ways."

"How?"

"Sometimes they used to be returned to the owners, and at other times they used to be shipped off to Holland."

"Well, Blue, look here. As we know very well, Johnny has not had much time for attending to his business lately, so perhaps there has been a lot shipped off, and no more brought to replace them."

"That may be."

"Do not give up until you have thoroughly searched the place. It was not those packages, but some of the ingots of silver I saw that we wanted. If we take those, it will be money in a small compass."

"Well, come this way, Jack. I have my doubts, but perhaps we shall find what we want."

"As he spoke, Blueskin led the way across the empty warehouse to the little recess, or smaller chamber, in which the furnace was fixed."

But they felt no increase of temperature in this place. It was as cold as the other, so the furnace evidently was not lighted, and had not been for some time, for it always left a heat in the place long after it was extinguished.

But on going to a corner near the furnace, the joy of our two friends can be imagined when they saw a glittering heap of the silver ingots they were so anxious to possess, and looking as though they had only just been made.

CHAPTER COXXII.

JACK AND BLUESKIN DESPOIL WILD'S WAREHOUSE OF THE MOST VALUABLE PORTION OF ITS CONTENTS, AND AGREE TO BURY THE TREASURE.

"HERE'S luck, if you like, Blue," exclaimed Jack, as he saw the so-much-wished-for treasure. "Here's luck."

"Yes. I can tell you it is more than I hoped to find, Jack. I am very glad. Our troubles are more than half over now. Why, here at least is a sum of money sufficient to last you years."

"As you say, there must be; but come, Blue, do not let us waste a moment in talking. I am sure we have no time to spare. You take up as many as you can carry in your arms, and I will do the same. We will put them down by the door of the shed, and then come for more."

"Agreed, Jack. There is sound sense in that arrangement, but you must recollect you will have to carry the lantern."

"Oh! I will see about that. You pick up some of the shiners."

In a very deliberate manner, Blueskin set to work.

The ingots were of a small size, and his first proceeding was to cram his pockets full of them.

Then he got as many in his hands and arms as he could possibly carry.

Then Jack took up some, and both staggered up the steps.

Then, having deposited their precious burden close to the door of the shed, they descended again.

This operation they continued several times, until they had removed nearly all the ingots.

Then, as they had got about six times as much as they really wanted, they determined not to fetch any more.

Besides, time was speeding on.

"I have a mind to bring the horse and cart quietly into the yard, Jack, and load it. Think of the time and trouble it will save."

"Oh! I should say do it, by all means."

"Very well. We can close the outer gate when we get it inside, and then if any one goes by, there won't seem to be anything amiss."

This being agreed to, Blueskin unlocked the door of the shed, and our two friends cautiously emerged into the yard.

All was still silent.

There was not the least indication of an alarm having been given.

But, upon looking up to the sky, they saw that it was beginning to change colour, and to rapidly grow lighter.

"We must make haste, Blue," said Jack, "or we shall have daylight upon us before we finish."

"We shall, indeed; the dawn is much closer at hand than I should have thought."

"It has been a busy night, and I must say I am beginning to grow tired."

"Never mind that. You hold the gate open, and I will go and fetch the horse and cart."

Jack held the gate open as he had been requested.

Blueskin, owing to the precaution he had taken, found the horse and cart just where he had left it.

Untying the animal's legs, he took him by the bridle, and, as silently as he could, walked him into the yard.

No sooner were they fairly inside than Jack closed the gate.

The cart was drawn close up to the shed, and the ingots of silver loaded into it with speed and silence.

At length all were safely in.

Then, as before, Jack held open the yard gate, and led the horse out into the street.

The instant that this was done, both scrambled into the cart, and Blueskin, taking the reins, drove off at a rapid pace.

"We may think ourselves most lucky," said the latter; "we have got away, you see, without raising the least alarm, and with ten times as much booty as I expected."

"Fortune favours us; but now, Blue, having got the money, there arises another rather important question."

"What is that?"

"Why, where we are to dispose of it, until such time as we may want to make use of it."

"I don't know."

"Nor I."

"Suppose we were to take it to Tumposki's?"

"Trust a Jew with it?"

"Why not?"

"Never."

"I am sure it would be safe."

"Well, it might be, and I don't say it would not, but I should not rest while he had it. No, Blue, you must think of some other place where we can keep it."

"That will be a difficult matter, and the worst of it is we have very little time to decide, for see, it is getting daylight already."

"So it is. But some place must be thought of. We can't carry all that lot about in our pockets, it is not likely."

"I never for a moment thought it. Can't you suggest anything? I know you are fertile in expedients, Jack."

"Which way are you going?"

"I was making straight for Tumposki's."

"I thought so. Now, I'll tell you what would do better than that."

"What?"

"Why, turn the horse's head round, and drive to some of the fields on the river-side below Chelsea. You will find there lots of lonely, rarely-visited spots, and I think the best thing we could do would be to bury the silver there."

"Well, I daresay it would be safe."

"It would, and I should recommend you to bury it in small portions, which would diminish the chances of discovery, and we could fetch a little just as we wanted it, and turn it into guineas by degrees."

"Well, I'll turn the horse, and do as you say."

"I think there cannot be two opinions about it being the best plan we could adopt."

"We shall be late."

"We shall, and yet we shall reach there almost before sunrise."

"I don't doubt that."

"Then, about those desolate places we are not likely to find any one at that early hour, and besides, the mist off the water will serve as an excellent screen to hide us."

"You have laid hold of the right idea, Jack, but, as you say, the money must certainly be buried in small quantities in different places, so that if one is found, which is not at all unlikely, we shall not lose the lot."

"That is just what I thought."

"Come on, then."

Blueskin, as soon as Jack had made up his mind, had turned the horse round, and drove in the direction of which he spoke, of course taking care not to pass near the Horseferry.

On reaching Chelsea, about the spot where the hospital now stands, the character of the place fully bore out the description which Jack had given of it.

The numerous low-lying fields, then nowhere near any buildings, were covered with a dense white mist, which made it impossible for them to see far before them.

But finding the road good, they still drove on, and passed the foot of Battersea-bridge.

The further they proceeded, the denser grew the mist. It was, too, very cold, and settled upon them in large drops of moisture.

But it was in places scarcely so high as it had been, being densest nearest the ground, so that when Jack stood up in the cart he was able to see tolerably well about him, and direct his companion where to drive.

"Blue," he said, "it has just struck me that somewhere about here there is a clump of trees which stretch right down to the water's edge. Now, don't you think that would make a good hiding-place?"

"I do; and moreover, if we had the treasure not far from the river's side, we could row down here some dark night, and carry a quantity away in the boat and dispose of it."

"Capital. The place must be somewhere close here. Drive carefully. I see it just before us. Pull up now."

Blueskin pulled up, and then stood up in the cart to see that his young comrade was not mistaken.

Through the upper stratum of the mist he could just define a mass of something dark.

"We won't drive too close up to the place, Blue, for fear of leaving a trace."

"How shall you manage then?"

"Why, I will stand here with the horse and cart, while you load yourself with as many of the ingots as you can conveniently carry. Then, when you return from having placed them somewhere among the trees, you can stand by the horse while I take a load, and so do it by turns."

"Very well, that will do; at least, I will carry the lot, or how will you know where to take them to?"

"Just as you like."

Jack then loaded Blueskin with a great many ingots, who started off while he stood there on guard.

Blueskin was absent some moments, but when he returned he said—

"I shan't be so long next time; I had to fix upon a place, you know, and to take notice where I was going."

Away he went with load number two, and he continued this process till the whole had been transferred to the wood.

"There seems to be no people about; I have not heard a sound or seen a thing all the time."

"So much the better, then."

"Just so; and I think it would be quite safe if we were to leave the horse and cart here."

"I should not leave them in the road. If you go a little further you will come to a gate leading into the fields. We will lead the horse in there."

"That will do."

Blueskin led the way to the gate he spoke of, and Jack, taking the horse by the bridle, followed.

The gate was not fastened in any way, so they swung it open, and passed in without difficulty.

The links with which the horses two fore legs had previously been fastened were again produced, and the animal having been secured, they made the best of their way to the wood.

There were now some very unequivocal symptoms of the sun making his appearance and dispersing the mist.

Still they thought they should have time, before any one came to the spot, to do what they wished.

Just as they were passing out of the gate, Jack struck his foot against something, which fell with a clattering sound to the ground.

He would have paid no further attention to it, however, if his companion had not asked—

"What's that?"

Jack stooped to see, and then he cried—

"More luck! fortune is on our side at last! It is a spade! What in the world should we have done without one?"

CHAPTER CCXXIII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD TAKE LODGINGS IN NEWGATE-STREET, NEXT DOOR TO JONATHAN WILD'S.

JUST at that moment so simple a thing as a spade was a valuable acquisition to our two friends, for without one they would have found their task of burying the treasure both tiresome and laborious.

With a lighter heart than he had had in his bosom for many a long day, Jack shouldered the spade and followed Blueskin to the wood with a quick step.

The little clump of trees, however, which grew upon the margin of the river was scarcely worthy of being dignified with the name of wood, but still, for want of a better appellation, we must so designate it.

Blueskin had deposited the ingots of silver in one heap, and so close to the river that they had already begun to sink in the soft earth.

We need not linger over this portion of our narrative. Let it suffice for us to say that, with the aid of their spade, they, in about an hour buried all the ingots, with the exception of four, two of which were carried by Jack and two by Blueskin.

In accordance with the arrangement they had made, the ingots were not buried in one heap.

Indeed, they even went so far as to dig a hole for each ingot, of which there were in all thirty-seven.

By the time they had finished, however, the sun had attained a considerable altitude, and the mist had been wholly dispersed.

But, to the best of their knowledge, they had not been seen in what they were about by any living creature. For certain they had not been in any way disturbed in what they were about.

Going forth into the lane, they were pleased to find the place still preserved its solitary and desolate character.

"Now, Jack," said Blueskin, "what is to be done next?"

We must be uncommonly careful, bear in mind, for Jonathan Wild won't be long before he hears of his loss, and he will set it down to us directly."

"He can't know of it yet, Blue; and there can't be many people astir yet. I think the best thing to do will be to get into the cart and drive straight back to Tumposki's, in Seven Dials, if you think we can make sure of shelter there."

"But that will be a very bold and hazardous proceeding, Jack."

"What, to drive through London?"

"In broad daylight!"

"Not a bit of it. You may depend if we get into the cart, and drive along like ordinary people, taking no notice of anybody or anything, nobody will take notice of us."

"I don't know that, Jack."

"Well, let us try it."

"I don't mind if you don't, of course, but still capture, now that we have succeeded so well, would be uncommonly vexatious."

"I admit that. But do you know I don't think we shall run into much danger. In the first place, it will be such a bold and daring thing to do that no one would believe we had the courage to attempt it."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Get the cart out of the field, and let us start at once, and get to our journey's end as soon as possible."

The cart was got out into the lane, and our two friends entered it and drove back to London.

They tried their best to carry out the plan which Jack had mentioned, though neither of them could altogether forbear from casting furtive glances around them when they fairly got into London.

However, with a boldness which no one could help admiring, they took their course in a direct line and through the principal thoroughfares to their destination.

But in this to a great extent lay the secret of their success.

Without any mischance happening to them whatever, they arrived at the door of the Jew's house in Little Earl street, Seven Dials.

They had evidently been watched for and expected, for no sooner had they brought their vehicle to a standstill than the door was opened, and Tumposki appeared upon the threshold.

Our two friends were out with marvellous celerity, and ran into the house.

There was a boy standing in the passage, and he ran out to take charge of the horse.

"Don't ask any questions, Aaron," said Blueskin, observing the look of astonishment which was depicted upon the Israelite's countenance; "but tell me, is that boy who has just run out capable of driving a horse?"

"Oh! dear, yes."



[BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, AND EDGORTH BESS HIDE FROM WILD IN THE CATHEDRAL.]

"Then call him inside a moment, and I will tell him where I want the horse and cart taken."

The Jew did as he was desired, and then Blueskin gave the boy the required directions.

As soon as he had departed, the Jew led our two friends into the sitting-room where their preceding interview had taken place.

Jack then entered into an account of the various incidents which had befallen them since they last saw each other, and concluded with the production of the four ingots of silver.

They were not, however, very candid with him. Jack judged it would be best not to be.

For instance, he did not tell him from whence the silver had been taken.

Nor did he tell him that they had any more than what they placed upon the table.

"Now, Aaron," said Jack, "look at those, and tell me what you think of them."

The Jew's eyes glistened as he estimated the weight of the ingots by balancing them in his hand.

"Now we want, of course, to turn them into money, and we trust to you to give us as much as you can for them without reserving an extravagant profit to yourself. We will settle with you for the rest afterwards."

"Be honest with us," Blueskin. "If you are you will find it the best policy in the long run."

"I will be honest with you," said the Jew, "and give you a fair price for the silver. Wait a moment, and I will fetch my scales."

The scales were in a cupboard close at hand, so they were soon produced.

Then, with scrupulous care, Tumpoksi proceeded to weigh each ingot.

The weight of each he put down on a piece of paper, in characters intelligible to no one but himself.

Then he added the whole up.

"How much can you give?" asked Jack, who was eager and impatient to arrive at the result."

"They do not weigh just the same each," said the Jew, "although the difference is slight. I can give you forty-eight pounds for the four, and, if you will believe me, that is almost their full value."

"Say fifty," cried Jack, while he rapidly divided the whole number of ingots by four and multiplied them by fifty, in order to get at the total value of the whole.

"No; I can only say forty-eight."

"That is twelve pounds each," said Blueskin.

"Just so; and I should not say so little as that, only I thought it would induce you to be liberal with me."

"Well, give us ten pounds each, and keep the remainder on account. You shall have nothing to complain of from us on the score of liberality."

This matter being thus adjusted, a meal was brought in, and while they were discussing it, Blueskin spoke to the old Jew as follows—

"Aaron, we want you to render us a service—a very important service, and yet an easy one. Will you do it?"

"Of course I will."

"That's hearty. Now listen to me."

"I am all attention."

"As I daresay you know, there is, next door to Jonathan Wild's house in Newgate-street, a house which is let out in lodgings."

"I did not know it, but I daresay there is, as you say so."

"Well, this house is occupied by a shoemaker, who keeps the ground floor, and lets all the rest of the house to lodgers."

The Jew nodded.

"They are always having changes in their tenants, so I want you to go there at once and ascertain whether they have one of their top attics to let."

"I understand."

"Mind you, no other room than one next to the roof, and with a window opening on to the tiles will answer my purpose. Do you understand that?"

"I do."

"Well, then, if there should be, and I think it very likely, you will please take that room for Jack and myself, without, of course, saying who we are. You can call us Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith."

"But you don't mean to say you are going to take apartments next door to Jonathan Wild's?"

"Yes we are, but never you mind that. If you quite understand what we want, be good enough to oblige us by setting off at once. If they want any reference, you can pay them a guinea on account."

"All right. If there is an attic to let in the house you mention, I will take it."

"Do so."

"But how if there is not?"

"Try all the other houses on that side of Warwick-lane, though I should much prefer the one I mentioned, if you can manage it."

"I am off now. Here are the ten pounds each you asked for, and the remainder is to go on account. You must remember I was responsible for the two horses you have lost."

"Yes, I know all about that, and if you will serve us faithfully, I will take care that you are not a loser by it."

The Jew, a few minutes afterwards, set out upon his errand, and Jack and Blueskin, who were both much fatigued, repaired to the room they had previously occupied, and endeavoured to obtain a few hours' rest and sleep.

Not only did they stand in immediate need of both on the score of exhaustion, but they felt that in all probability they would have a hard and harassing night's work to do, and when they should have another chance as good as the present was very problematical.

They had not to woo slumber long. It soon came to them.

When they awoke, the Jew was standing at their bedside.

"What is the result of your errand?" cried Blueskin.

"Tell me at once. Do not keep us in suspense."

"Success."

"You have met with success?"

"Yes, the back attic in the shoemaker's house is to let."

"Was to let, you mean?"

"Just so."

"And you have taken it for Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER CCXXIV.

OUR TWO FRIENDS DEPART UPON THEIR PERILOUS EXPEDITION.

"BRAVO, Aaron," said Blueskin, leaping off the bed upon which he had thrown himself, without removing any of his apparel. "Let us hear the whole of the story from beginning to end."

"Very well," replied Tamposki. "I went from here straight to Newgate-street, and next door to Jonathan Wild's I found the shoemaker's, as you described."

"Did you look up at Jonathan's house?" asked Jack.

"I did."

"Did you see anything?"

"Nothing unusual. The door was closed."

"Go on about the shoemaker," said Blueskin. "That is what I want to hear most."

"I found the front door open."

"It always is."

"I knocked, and presently the landlord made his appearance. I told him what I wanted, and he said 'Yes, some people that had lived in his top back-attic had moved yesterday.' I asked to see the place, so he took me up an endless lot of stairs, until at last, passing through a door, we stood in a little bit of a place that could not be called a room."

"Never mind what it could be called," said Blueskin. "Had it got a window opening on to the tiles?"

"Oh! yes."

"That is everything, then."

"I thought the place would suit you, so I asked how much the rent was, and he told me two shillings a-week."

"Did he ask for any references?"

"Yes; but I told him that the two gentlemen who were about to take it would only want to occupy it occasionally, and that they had commissioned me, I felt any scruples about the matter, to pay him ten wif he in advance."

"What did he say then?"

"Oh! that removed all difficulty, and I gave him a guinea, telling him to keep the extra shilling to drink your health."

"You told him we should want to come to-night."

"Yes."

"Did he make any objection?"

"None whatever."

"What is about the time?"

"Noon."

"Very well; we shall not want to go till dusk, so you will please let us stay where we are until then."

"Agreed."

"We want to have as much sleep as we can, for I have no idea when we shall get another chance."

"When shall I call you?"

"Just about sunset. We will then come down, have something to eat, and start off."

"Of course, it is nothing to me," said the Jew; "but I think you will be running into very great danger by going to Newgate-street. You are a couple of daring chaps, I know; but still I think you ought to use a little discretion."

"Trust to us," said Blueskin; "our plans are carefully matured, and the danger we shall incur will not be half so much as you seem to think."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Leave us now, and rest assured that to-night we shall strike such a blow at Jonathan Wild that he will scarcely be able to recover from it."

The Jew's eyes glittered, and rubbing his hands briskly together, he said—

"Let me see you do that—let me see you do that, and I will cheerfully assist you in any way that lies in my power. If you want money to carry out the enterprize against him, call upon me. I would give you the last shukel I possessed."

"Make your mind easy," said Jack; "you must know that whenever I make up my mind to do a thing I always

do it. Now I have made up my mind to hang Jonathan Wild at Tyburn, and you mark my words if I don't."

"That would be brave—brave, indeed."

"Leave us, then, and think it over. You may depend it will be done."

The old Jew left the room, and then Jack, turning to his comrade, said—

"You told the old Jew just now that all our plans were matured."

"I know I did, and so they are."

"I don't doubt that, but you forget I do not share in them, nor do I know what you intend to do, except that I can guess why you have taken the top attic in the house next to Jonathan Wild's."

"Haven't I told you?"

"No."

"Then I thought I had. However, I will give you my plan of operations in a very few words."

"Do so, and then I shall be able to rest all the better."

"Well, my plan is simply this. To-night we go to this house next to Wild's, and enter upon the occupation of the attic."

"Yes."

"The first thing we shall do will be to climb out of the window on to the roof, and from thence on to the roof of Wild's house."

"That is just what I thought."

"In the roof of this there is, to my knowledge, a trap-door."

"And to mine," said Jack, "for I once raised it and got through."

"I intend for you to do the same thing again."

"Let us hear the arrangements you have made."

"I agreed with Steggs, then, that I would tap on this trap-door in a certain manner. If Wild was out, and the coast perfectly clear, he would unfasten it, for it is now always kept bolted. If Wild was there, and it was dangerous for us to enter, he should take no notice, and we should have to wait."

"Good, that is a most excellent arrangement, provided always that Steggs does not play us false."

"I don't think you need fear that."

"I hope he will not."

"So do I."

"If he took it into his head to betray us to Jonathan, we should be very awkwardly situated indeed."

"I fancy he hates the thief-taker too cordially for that. You must remember he has treated him very badly."

"He has."

"And Steggs is a man of a most vindictive character."

"That is a good deal."

"But we must run the risk of that. Let me tell you the remainder of my plans."

"Yes, do."

"Should the coast be quite clear, and Steggs unbolt the door, I shall remain upon the roofs to keep watch and ward, while you will descend through the trap-door, and make your way to the room where Edgworth Bess is confined."

"Go on, go on."

"With all the speed possible you will make her acquainted with what you intend to do, and then bring her to the trap-door. I shall be above, and will assist her on to the roofs; you will follow, and Steggs, if he thinks proper."

"It is a capital plan."

"Do you think it likely to succeed?"

"I think it certain to do so, if Jonathan is from home."

"So do I; and as for that, Steggs will be able to tell us of it. When you are all fairly on the roof, the trap-door will be closed, and we shall make our way into the attic, and thence into the street."

"What then?"

"The next thing will be instant and immediate flight. The treasure must be unburied, and we must make the best of our way out of England, and not return until Edgworth Bess has passed her twenty-first birthday."

Jack clasped Blueskin by the hand.

"I think I can see the end of all that we have endured. Happiness, old friend, is in store for us, I feel sure of that."

"I trust so, Jack."

"Oh! I feel sure of it—quite sure. But stay; there is something in your plans which you have omitted."

"What?"

"When we descend from the attic and make our way into Newgate-street, where shall we betake ourselves?"

"I hardly know, Jack, where we ought to go first."

"And how shall we escape—on foot?"

"I think so."

"But if Wild pursues us?"

"I am in hopes he will not."

"But we must provide for the possibility of his doing so."

"It would be wisest."

"Of course it would."

"What should we do?"

"I leave that to you."

"I do not want to excite suspicion. Now, if we had a vehicle of any sort waiting in Newgate-street, it will be sure to attract attention."

"Then which way are we to take to leave England?"

"You shall yourself decide."

"Shall we go to Holland or to France?"

"Just as you please."

"I should say France."

"Very well."

"Then, as for the route, I should say take the most unfrequented one you can find, and embark from some obscure port."

"Certainly."

"If we were to go to Dover, or anywhere there, Jonathan would be down upon us directly."

"Unquestionably."

"I think Edgworth Bess can ride."

"What of that?"

"Suppose we were to have three horses saddled, and kept waiting for us, not necessarily in Newgate-street, but somewhere close at hand?"

"That might be done."

"Oh! yes, and then we should at least stand a chance of making our escape, even if Jonathan Wild should pursue us."

"Let it be so, then, and consider that all our arrangements are finally settled."

"I think they are."

"And now, get all the sleep you can, and so be able to endure fatigue, for it strikes me it will be a long time before you will have any rest."

"I fear so."

Blueskin did not reply.

He was more weary and more in need of sleep than his younger and more active companion.

But in a little while both slumbered, nor did they awake until just dusk. In accordance with the arrangement made, the old Jew came into the room to wake them.

They started up hastily and went down, where they eat heartily, as men only can eat who do not know when food will pass their lips again.

CHAPTER CCXXV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN TAKE POSSESSION OF THEIR LODGINGS.

INSTRUCTIONS were given to Aaron Tumposki to have three saddle-horses waiting just round the corner of Warwick-lane, one of which was, of course, to be furnished with a side-saddle.

Then, these arrangements having been made, and as the streets were quite dark, our friends, well and fully armed, with their hearts nerved with courage, and their muscles strung for action, set out upon their perilous excursion.

To reach the place of their destination, however, they made a considerable detour, getting into Newgate-street, in fact, not from the Skinner-street, but St. Martin's-le-Grand end.

The street was dark and tolerably full of people.

But unheeding them, our two friends made their way to the house we have so often mentioned.

Upon reaching it, as a matter of course, they found the front door wide open, and, as another matter of course, the shoemaker was standing on his doorstep, gazing at the passers by in the street.

In fact, his shoemaking business was a mere blind. The

fellow was idle, and he made enough out of his lodgers not only to pay the rent, but to keep his wife and children.

Consequently, early and late he was to be seen there adorning the doorway.

It would seem as though he had been on the look-out for his new lodgers. Doubtless, the fact of their having paid so long in advance roused his curiosity.

Now, neither Jack nor Blueskin wished him to peruse their countenances, so affecting to take no notice, they brushed past him into the passage, which was very dark.

Jack spoke, for Blueskin feared that this man might know the tones of his voice.

"Where is the landlord?" he asked.

"Who are you?" asked the shoemaker, trying in vain to pierce the gloom and obtain a glimpse of his lodgers' countenances.

"We are Jones and Smith," said Jack, "and have come to take possession of the attic which our friend took for us."

"Oh! indeed gentlemen; very well; of course. I will show you the way upstairs. Wife! wife!"

"Well," cried a sharp, acerb voice, "what now?"

"A light, to show the gentlemen upstairs."

There was a moment's silence, and then, from the lower regions of the house, there came the faint flashing of a light.

The shoemaker stepped forward and took a candle out of his wife's hand before she could get up to the top of the kitchen stairs.

"This way," he said, "this way," holding the light as high above his head as he could, in the endeavour to obtain a glimpse of his visitors.

But both had their hats drawn so close down over their brows, and the candle itself gave out such an insufficient light, that he was able to see little or nothing.

Besides which Jack said rapidly—

"Lead the way upstairs; make haste, because we have no time to spare."

The shoemaker had no resource but to obey, so up he went, without his curiosity being gratified.

The stairs did, indeed, seem endless, but at length the top of them was reached, and they were ushered into the attic.

"Leave the candle," said Jack, taking it out of the landlord's hand as he spoke, and shutting the door in his face.

Very indignantly the shoemaker stumped downstairs, and poured out his sorrows to his wife.

"Ah!" said she, in an oracular tone of voice, "that *surcin* means something."

"But what?"

"Something is going to happen; mark my words, if there isn't."

And this was all that could be elicited.

But leaving the landlord of the lodging-house and his wife, we will turn our attention to the proceedings of others in whom the reader must feel a much greater amount of interest.

No sooner was the door closed than Jack Sheppard shot a bolt into its socket.

He would have turned the key in the lock if there had been one.

But from that quarter they did not anticipate any interruption.

The attic was unfurnished, and the only place where they could put the candle was on the chimney-piece.

Our two friends then went to the window.

It was a small one, and opened upon two hinges like a door.

It was most convenient for their purpose.

Jack opened it, and crawled out on to the tiles.

He was quickly followed by Blueskin.

The night, like the preceding one, was a very dark one.

There was no moon, and not even a solitary star could be seen in the whole sky.

From the window the roof sloped down to a kind of a parapet, which was about eighteen inches high.

Our friends had to lower themselves down to this, and then stood in the gutter.

It was full of mud and water, but they could walk along without much trouble, and in a few minutes, by continuing in a westerly direction, they got fairly on to the roof of Wild's house.

The locality of the trap-door was of course well known

to Blueskin and Jack. To the former from his residence with a thief-taker, and to the latter because he had once on a memorable occasion made his way through it.

On reaching it they crouched down on the tiles and listened.

But all was profoundly still.

Blueskin took his clasp-knife, and with the horn handle of it struck the trap-door in a peculiar manner.

Then he waited with patience for a response.

More than five minutes elapsed before it came.

That fleeting space of time seemed lengthened into half-an-hour by the waiters on the roof-top.

Then the welcome sound came to their ears of the withdrawal of a bolt.

It was followed by another similar sound, and then the trap-door was slowly raised.

Seeing this, Blueskin took hold of the edge of it and raised it up.

The moment he did so Steggs put his head through the aperture.

A scared look was on his face.

"Where is Wild?" Blueskin asked, without allowing him an opportunity to speak.

"Out! Can it be possible you are here?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Jonathan is like a maniac. He has learned from some one that you broke into his warehouse in the Horseferry, and took away six hundred pounds worth of silver ingots."

"Well, what of that?"

"He has gone there determined to hunt you down. He will track you, he says, until he runs you to earth."

"Pho! pho! Don't pay any attention to what he says. It's all rubbish. He has not got us, you see, and yet here we are on the top of his own house."

"I don't know how soon he may return."

"Never mind! We have made up our minds to take Edgworth Bess away this very night. It won't be safe for her to stay here any longer. You had better come too."

"You had better not try to-night."

"Why not?"

"Wild is so awfully savage."

"I know that," replied Blueskin, "and fully expected he would be, and that is why I thought to-night would be the best to achieve our purpose. But we are wasting time by talking here, and I am quite certain we have not a moment to spare. I shall keep watch here on the roofs; you keep guard on the stairs; Jack will descend and speak to Edgworth Bess."

"Come on, then, since you will have it so, though I should advise you to wait. The girl is quite safe where she is, and I will answer that no harm comes to her. Besides, while she is here, Jonathan is more at rest."

"It cannot be helped, Steggs. We have made up our minds to take her away, and all our arrangements are completed."

"I shall have to leave with you."

"So much the better."

"To remain in my present situation after she is gone would only be casting away my life."

"We cannot stay to unfold our plans now, Steggs, but you shall hear them shortly, and when they are made known to you, I am sure they will meet with your approval."

"Come on, then."

Steggs and Jack did not speak to each other, and there was a certain feeling of hostility between them that not even the present meeting could remove.

The latter, however, as soon as Steggs descended the ladder, by the aid of which he had reached the trap-door, followed him, and also down the attic stairs to the landing from which the door opened that led into the chamber where Edgworth Bess was confined.

Steggs, however, went to the head of the next flight of stairs and listened, but as he heard nothing suspicious, he waved his hand to Jack to stand aside while he entered the room and told Bess who was waiting for her, in order that in her surprise at seeing him she should not give vent to it in a cry which should alarm the house.

In the meanwhile, Jack, with a beating heart, stood on the landing listening for anything that might indicate the coming of his foes.

But in the thief-taker's house all was silent.

In fact, if Jack had known it, there could not have been any moment more propitious than the present.

The only persons now in the thief-taker's residence were Tonks and one of the band.

These two were both on duty.

One was on the lock at the front door.

The other on guard at the grating leading to the cells.

Jonathan Wild had been out some hours.

When the intelligence was brought to him that his warehouse in Westminster had been broken into and robbed, he did not require any one to tell him who were the thieves.

The existence of the place was known to but few persons, and there were fewer still who could have found their way into it.

Uttering the most awful curses that any one could conceive, Jonathan Wild had called his men together and rode to the Horseferry.

His determination was this.

When he arrived he would look all around for some clue as to the route taken by the robbers, and then, having once got upon the track, to follow it up, step by step, until he had them in his power.

But the mere relation of Jack's and Blueskin's adventures is enough to show that at present he had not succeeded in coming up with them.

CHAPTER CCXXVI.

JACK SHEPPARD'S HAPPINESS IS OF SHORT DURATION.

With a slow and steady step, and a look of extreme apprehension upon his face, Steggs came out of Edgworth Bess's room, and crossed the landing to where Jack stood.

"Enter," he said, "and be quick. Jonathan may return at any moment, and then all will be lost."

Jack Sheppard did not wait to hear the rest of this admonitory sentence, but hurried to the door.

It was partly closed.

He tapped upon the panel, and entered.

Then his ears were greeted with a faint but fervent cry of welcome.

Almost blind with emotion, he staggered forward, and through a kind of mist he caught sight of the form of she whom he loved better than all the world.

Then the next moment he felt her arms twined round his neck and her head upon his shoulder.

"Oh! Jack—Jack! You have come at last. I have for so long wished and expected you. You have come to save me, Jack, have you not? You will take me away from this hateful and terrible place—out of Jonathan Wild's power? Oh! Jack, I am so very glad to see you."

What Jack's feelings were at this moment no one could possibly tell.

He was in a kind of delirium, and scarcely conscious whether what was taking place was real or a disordered vision.

His heart swelled.

The sensation of joy which he experienced almost overcame him.

Loving her as he did, it was unspeakable rapture to hear her softly-uttered words and feel her arms around his neck.

Was he loved in return?

Could it be possible that she had for him similar feelings to those which he had in his breast for her.

He fancied so now.

It was not in his power to resist the influence which this feeling had over him.

Upon an impulse which he could not have controlled had instant death been the penalty of its gratification. He placed his arms around her slender form, and pressed her ardently against his breast.

At that moment he forgot the purport of the conversation he had had with Blueskin upon this very subject so short a time before.

He forgot their own perilous position.

Forgot that he was a condemned felon with a reward upon his head.

And where was he?

Instead of being far away and safe from all pursuit, there he was in a house that positively adjoined the prison of Newgate.

And not only that, he stood beneath the roof of his greatest and most implacable enemy.

The man who had over and over again sworn that he would bring him to the gallows, and since he swore that

oath, had he not step by step urged him forward to his fatal destination.

But all that faded from Jack's mind.

He only felt that he loved—that he held the object of his love to his heart—that her head was resting upon his shoulder—that her arms were round his neck.

She had spoken to him words of kindness—she had expressed her reliance upon him. He had come to save her.

Can it be wondered at that all these things produced a kind of intoxication in Jack's mind.

It was Edgworth Bess, however, who first roused him from this state of bliss—from the only moment of pure happiness that he had ever known.

"Jack," she said. "Release me now—you hurt me. How came you here? Oh! fly—fly! If Jonathan Wild returned, what would become of us?"

"Jonathan Wild!" repeated Jack, for the word struck upon his ear like a jarring discord in the midst of sweet music. "I have a reckoning to pay off with that villain. Do not fear him, for you may already consider yourself out of his power."

"Oh! that is joyful news, indeed. Out of his power? Oh! Jack, I knew you would save me. I felt sure of it. I have waited a long—long time for you to take me away from here; but you have come at last."

"I have; and what is more, I have two trusty friends to aid me, and so you have naught to fear. United, we are a match for Jonathan Wild."

"One is Steggs."

"Yes, and the other is Blueskin."

"He has, indeed, proved himself a friend."

"One is on the landing outside, and the other is on the roofs above, keeping guard."

"On the roofs?"

"Yes. I ought to have told you. The only way we can manage is for you to escape by the roofs. We have taken an attic in the house next door, and to that we shall have to make our way."

"Oh! Jack, you do not know how much I would do to be free from the power of the villain Wild."

"That is all you will have to do. Our course is plain and straight before us. Everything is arranged."

"Then let us fly at once."

"Are you prepared?"

"Quite; and Steggs has told me that Wild is not in the house, though no one knows how soon he may return. Oh! let us fly at once, lest he should come back and find us here."

"We will; but believe me, I have dedicated my life to your service. I am a condemned man. Do not shudder. The crime of which I was accused I am as innocent of as you are yourself. But ere I die I have determined that I will see you in possession of your rights, and Jonathan Wild swinging on the triple-tree at Tyburn!"

"If any one deserved such a fate," said Edgworth Bess, "he does, and he has proved himself so inveterate a foe to me, that I could not pity him were such to be his fate tomorrow."

"Pity him!" said Jack, "I should think not. But surely his course of iniquity must be well nigh run out. The crimes he has committed are enough for the damnation of twenty men!"

"Hush, Jack. I do not like to hear you talk like that."

"He brought my father to the scaffold. He offended him in some way, I know not how, but let it be what it may, for that offence he swore that he should die at Tyburn! He kept his oath, and murdered my father."

"Oh! it is terrible."

"And then, myself. Malignant fate in some way threw us together. At the time even when you saw me first I was in his employ, and had I taken part with him against yourself I should probably never have incurred his hate and enmity in the way I have done. But you know the perils and the dangers through which I have had to pass, and solely on his account. Then he brought a false charge of murder against me—kept away the lawyer who was instructed to appear in my behalf—and caused me to be sentenced to death."

"Your wrongs are great, and so are mine, but in the end we shall triumph, and he will pay the penalty of his guilty acts. If I can do anything to bring about so desirable an end you may depend I shall. But I look upon his downfall as certain."

"We shall see," said Jack; but come, I forget myself. This is not the time for talk or explanations. Blueskin will be wondering where I am so long."

"Oh! yes, Jack. Fly now. I hope we shall have many opportunities of talking to each other."

Reluctantly Jack went to the door of the chamber.

He knew Steggs was there not a moment before, for he had seen him, but now he was nowhere to be found.

Jack's mind was always full of suspicion as regards Steggs, and he looked upon his absence in an unfavourable light.

It was not without much misgiving, too, that he noticed it.

Could it be possible that he had gone to betray him? That he was entrapped?

Taking his companion by the arm, who could tell by his looks and manner—for he said nothing—that something was wrong, he passed out of the chamber on to the landing.

But there was no Steggs to be seen.

He made his way to the top of the stairs that led down into the hall, and looked down and listened.

The moment, however, that he stooped to put himself in a listening attitude, he heard the sounds of some unusual disturbance taking place below.

There was the trampling of feet, the shouting of voices, and among these last Jack fancied he could distinguish the tones of his arch enemy, Jonathan Wild.

But before he could decide upon this, he heard some one ascending the stairs rapidly.

He drew back, and put his left arm around Edgworth Bess, who was half fainting with terror.

Jack coolly drew his sword from its sheath.

Then turned to the other flight of stairs leading up to the attics.

"Fly!" he said, "fly! Be quick, for your life! I will guard this staircase, and cover your escape. Make your way out on to the roofs. You will see a ladder on the landing above that will enable you to do so."

"No, no, Jack; I will not fly and leave you here. You must come with me, or I stay."

"No, no, that must not be. I can ascend the stairs much quicker than yourself. Go up, I pray you. Don't waste time in needless argument. Ascend, ascend. I will follow you."

Thus adjured, and half terrified by the vehemence and rapidity with which Jack spoke, Edgworth Bess ran up the stairs leading to the attics.

At the same moment Steggs reached the top of the other flight.

He looked heated, alarmed, and breathless.

Behind him Jack could hear some one else coming.

His heart told him it was Jonathan Wild.

The impression was firmly fixed upon Jack's mind that Steggs had betrayed him, and that conviction continued, although the first words Steggs spoke ought to have dissipated it.

"Fly!" he said, "fly! with all speed! Jonathan, by some means, has got upon your track, and is coming upstairs. Fly! fly!"

And Steggs came on up the attic stairs, which Jack gradually ascended sword in hand.

Edgworth Bess stood at the top.

"Villain!" cried Jack, his eyes still blinded by suspicion; "villain! you have already betrayed us to the rascally thief-taker, and now you wish to make our capture certain. Take that as a reward for your treachery!"

CHAPTER CXXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND JONATHAN WILD HAVE A STRUGGLE ON THE ROOF-TOPS, AND THE LATTER HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE.

As Jack uttered these words in a loud and furious tone of voice, he made a sudden thrust with his sword at Steggs as he was ascending the stairs.

It was impossible to avoid the stroke.

The plunge was a rapid and a vigorous one.

The sharp bright sword pierced his breast, and uttering a yell of agony, Steggs fell backwards down the stairs.

Jack Sheppard hardly stayed to see the consequences of this rash and foolish act, but turned and ran upstairs himself.

Bess was before him.

She had witnessed what had taken place, and was almost too horrified to move or speak.

Steggs had shown himself her friend on so many occasions, and done her so many services, that she had grown to like him, and was quite assured of his fidelity.

"There is the ladder," cried Jack. "Haste, haste, or it will be too late! You will find Blueskin above."

"Here I am," said a voice, and immediately a ray of light from the trap-door above was sent down upon the landing.

It was Blueskin, who held a dark lantern in his hand.

Edgworth Bess saw the ladder, and commenced ascending it.

"Be quick, Blue! Steggs has betrayed us to Wild, but he has paid for his treachery with his death! Take Bess up and over the roofs safely. I will stay behind, and cover the retreat. Quick, I say, or Jonathan will be upon us! Ha! he is here!"

Jonathan had by the greatest chance escaped being thrown down by the body of Steggs, but he had just time to step back.

He paused for a moment, and then ran up the attic stairs, all the time calling lustily to his men to follow him.

Blueskin took in the aspect of affairs at a glance, and, stooping down, caught hold of Bess by both her arms, and drew her up through the trap-door.

Jack Sheppard ran to the foot of the ladder and ascended it rapidly.

He was in hopes of being able to reach the top and get on to the roof in time to either draw the ladder up after him or throw it down so as to impede the progress of his foe.

But Jonathan was too close behind him.

His feet were on the lowest rounds of the ladder before Jack could get on to the roof.

Passion lent Jonathan strength and speed, and he ascended the ladder with marvellous quickness.

But, on reaching the roof above, Jack once more grew calm and cool.

Blueskin had not got far off with Edgworth Bess, and they would have some awkward ridges to surmount before they reached the window leading into the attic of the next door house.

Jack did not know the reason then, but we may as well acquaint the reader with it now.

It was well that Blueskin caught hold of the poor girl and drew her through the trap-door on to the roof in the manner we have recorded. Had he not done so, she could never have got out by her own powers.

Although much better than she had been, she was far from recovered from her dangerous illness. She found herself even weaker than she anticipated.

The excitement, too, of her unexpected meeting with Jack—the sudden appearance of Wild—and the encounter with Steggs, all had their full effect upon her debilitated frame.

Indeed, we have hinted that on the landing, when Jack put his arm around her and led her to the bottom of the stairs, she was in a half-fainting condition.

But on the ladder, as soon as Jack pronounced the words in reference to Wild, "He is here!" she involuntarily turned round and caught sight of the countenance of the villainous thief-taker, which was fully revealed by the light of the lantern.

Her strength seemed then to utterly desert her, and Blueskin caught hold of her at a most opportune moment: otherwise she would have fallen to the ground.

By the dead weight she hung upon his hands, Blueskin guessed what had taken place, and when she was fairly outside he found his worst forebodings were confirmed.

She was in a swoon.

This was an unlooked-for dilemma.

However, he took her in his arms, and carried her for a short distance, until indeed, owing to the awkward slopes of the tiles, it became impossible to carry her any longer.

Then he placed her down carefully.

How was he to revive her?

He felt hot and cold by turns as he thought Jonathan would be upon them ere they could make good their escape.

He felt in his pockets, and the first thing his hand encountered was a flask containing some brandy.

This, he imagined, would go farther towards reviving her than anything else he could find, so, hastily pulling out the cork, he poured no inconsiderable quantity of the burning fluid down her throat.

The effect was instantaneous.

She gasped violently for a moment, and then recovered. Blueskin looked behind him.

He saw Jack standing, with his sword drawn, over the trap-door through which he had come.

The only way in which he could aid him was, as he knew, to make all speed with Edgworth Bess to the attic window, and this he at once set about.

With these few words of explanation why they did not go further in the time than they did, we will leave them, and turn our attention to Jack Sheppard.

As Blueskin had seen, he was standing with his sword drawn.

Jonathan Wild reached the top of the ladder, and saw his adversary there ready to receive him.

But nothing daunted by the advantageous position of his foe, Blueskin drew his own hanger from its sheath, and held it before him to guard his person.

Jack did not speak.

His whole attention was centred upon his adversary, and not the slightest movement that he made escaped his vision.

As yet Jonathan Wild was out of his reach, or he would have assuredly attacked him.

Cautiously, however, Jonathan mounted the ladder.

Then, with his sword ready for action, he made a sudden and impetuous rush upwards.

Jack saw him coming.

But almost before he could strike at his foe he was standing on the roof.

In an instant Wild pressed forward and attacked his foe with his heavy hanger.

Jack, however, stood firmly.

Now the advantage was on Wild's side.

Jack was not skilled in the use of the sword, and Jonathan was.

Moreover, the thief-taker had a style of fighting peculiar to himself, and which would have embarrassed even an accomplished fencer.

He relied altogether upon the vigorous delivery of heavy blows, brought down with the whole strength of his arm, and such as would break through any guard.

But Jack fought bravely against him during the few seconds that the conflict lasted.

Suddenly, however, Jonathan Wild, with one of his heavy blows, whistled his sword out of his hand.

Away it went whirling through the air, until it fell with a clattering sound upon the tiles.

And now, if Jonathan had wished to have taken Jack's life, he could most assuredly have done so.

But to have slain him with his own hand would not have satisfied his revenge.

Nor would it have allowed him to fulfill his oath.

Jack Sheppard, he resolved, should swing at Tyburn.

Dropping his own sword, then, he made a rush forward before Jack was aware of his intentions, and grasped him by the throat.

Then a furious struggle commenced.

Jonathan evidently thought that when it came to a hand-to-hand encounter, his superior strength would make the contest a brief one.

But he was mistaken.

Jack's muscles were like steel.

Backwards and forwards they went, now up the sloping roof, then down, reeling alarmingly near the open trap-door, which yawned for them like a grave, and so close to the low parapet which bounded the roof, that it seemed as though they must fall over it.

But they did not.

Then Jack managed to break from Wild's grasp.

With the swiftness of lightning he turned and fled.

But Wild was after him instantly, and caught hold of the skirt of Jack's coat as he climbed up the angular tiling.

Jack's hold was a frail one, and this almost pulled him down, but he struggled manfully, and grasped the edge from which the roof sloped down on both sides.

Needless, however, of his neck, Jonathan scrambled after him, and overtook him ere he could begin the descent.

Then in this perilous position, was their struggle renewed with redoubled fury.

But Jonathan soon got the advantage again over his opponent.

He forced Jack down.

Both were then compelled to release the hold which they had kept upon the tiles.

The consequence was that they slipped down with rather alarming rapidity.

Jack was undermost.

Wild's hands were tight upon his throat.

The sharp edges of the red tiles cut his head, tore his clothes, and grazed his skin as he slipped down with Wild upon him.

He gave himself up for lost.

But unexpected assistance suddenly presented itself.

Blueskin had safely reached the attic window with Edgworth Bess.

He had placed her in the room, requesting her not to stir while he went to effect Jack Sheppard's rescue.

The poor girl promised to obey.

He, however, made his arrival just in time to save his comrade.

He had a large pistol in his hand, but he was afraid to fire for fear of hitting Jack.

He grasped it by the barrel, and got as near the combatants as he could.

Then, seeing an opportunity, he brought the butt end down with full force upon Wild's head.

The blow was an awful one, and sufficient to extinguish life.

The thief-taker relaxed his grasp, and rolled down the roof towards the parapet.

CHAPTER CCXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD GIVES OUR FRIENDS A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE.

BLUESKIN stretched out his other hand, and clutched Jack Sheppard, thus arresting his descent.

Jack soon aided himself.

But no such aid was vouchsafed to Wild.

If not dead, he was certainly insensible, for no one could have received such a blow as that without losing consciousness.

He rolled down the tiles, then, and at length came with a dull crash against the low parapet.

There it was thought he would have stayed.

But an ominous cracking, crashing noise followed.

The parapet was old and rotten, and quite unable to stand against such a blow as that which Wild's body gave it.

It crumbled away in a large mass, and the whole, Jonathan Wild and all, disappeared from the eyes of our two friends, who were much startled by this unexpected occurrence.

Jack Sheppard, however, recovered himself instantly, and, not without some misgiving, they went to see what had become of their foe.

"He is done for at last, I do believe," said Blueskin. "I should never have thought it, for I have considered from the first that he was destined for the gallows, but it seems not."

"Don't make too sure," said Jack. "I have known him have as narrow an escape as this. Wait till we look down."

They now reached the edge, and not trusting the parapet so much as to lean against it, they looked down.

Beneath them was the yard at the back of Wild's house.

Just below, and not many feet off, was a roof belonging to some outbuilding, and on the top of this roof was a large water-tank or cistern.

It was uncovered.

Jonathan Wild had fallen into this.

He was not dead.

So thick was his skull, that the blow he received only partially stunned him.

The cistern, which providentially was just under where he fell, was almost full of water, and he fell into it with a tremendous splash.

The sudden contact with the cold water restored him so

far to his senses that he struggled about, and finally stood up.

The water then reached to his breast.

More our two friends did not wait to see, but made the best of their way to the attic where they knew Edgworth Bess would be anxiously and impatiently awaiting their return.

From Jonathan Wild they would have nothing to fear, for a little while at least.

But, then, there were his men.

How it was they had not long before this made their appearance upon the scene was more than they could tell.

They did not know, however, the extent of Wild's precautions in this matter, nor how he had disposed his forces so as to make their capture certain.

Indeed, they thought their danger was very nearly over. Certainly all they would have to do would be to join their horses as quickly as possible and make the best of their way off.

The attic window was reached in perfect safety, and without any further molestation.

Edgworth Bess could not suppress a cry of joy when she saw them enter. She had been in a state of terrible, anxiety, and suspense ever since she had been left, and the sounds of strife, which had of course reached her ears, filled her with the utmost dread, and more than once she had been upon the point of going to them, only she remembered the promise which she had given to Blueskin not to stir.

Now she was rewarded for having obeyed it by seeing them return safe and unhurt.

They soon passed through the window into the attic and closed it.

The candle, which had been stuck against the corner of the mantelpiece, was still burning, though a preternaturally long wick dimmed its light.

But Blueskin snuffed it, and then the three fugitives could see each other's faces.

Jack Sheppard carried the marks of the harsh usage he had received both upon his face and his apparel.

But although he was scratched, and had bled a little, still he was not much hurt.

"What shall we do now?" asked Bess.

"That is just what I think requires a little consideration," said Blueskin; "good gracious, what's that?"

A succession of the most awful howls which any one could possibly imagine arose as Blueskin uttered these last words.

"It's Johnny," said Jack; "he doesn't seem to like his cold bath."

"Yes; that is Jonathan's voice, beyond the slightest doubt."

"What an awful noise he makes."

"He does; and if we have not already alarmed the whole neighbourhood with our uproar, his howls are sure to do it. Hark at that!"

"Yes, Blueskin, my friend, you must take that into consideration."

"What?"

"Our having alarmed the neighbourhood."

"I know that."

"We must be careful now how we proceed; I can see our troubles are not half over yet."

"No, confound it, I was in hopes they were."

"So was I, but they certainly are not."

"If the neighbourhood is alarmed."

"Say, if it is on the alert."

"Well, on the alert. What had we better do?"

"I think it would be hardly safe to do as we at first proposed."

"What, walk downstairs, and out of the front door into Newgate-street?"

"Yes."

"Certainly not. I shouldn't wonder if there's not quite a mob of people there."

"Nor I."

"Or else, what is more likely, some of Jonathan's men are stationed to keep watch upon the houses."

"You may depend upon it that has been done."

"Steggs told him, doubtless, that we intended to effect our escape."

"Ah! you said something about Steggs having betrayed us to Wild?"

"Yes, I know I did."

"Did he?"

"Betray us?"

"Yes."

"Certainly he did."

"How do you know?"

"While I was in the room with Edgworth Bess, he slipped off downstairs, and brought Wild up with him."

"Did he?"

"Yes, he did."

"And have you slain him?"

"I don't know. I met him on the stairs, and gave him a few inches of steel in his chest."

"What then?"

"He fell backwards downstairs."

"How awkward."

"I knew he would play us false. I said so from the first."

"I think Jack has been led into error through his dislike," said Edgworth Bess, joining in the conversation.

"Why so?"

"I believe Steggs to have been faithful towards us. He might have gone downstairs to see whether Wild had come home, so as to give us warning, which he seemed to be doing."

"I'll lay my life that's it, Jack."

"I don't think it."

"I do, and you will find you have made another enemy, for now Steggs will be nothing but a foe to us, and from the fact of his knowing all our plans, we shall be almost certain to be overmatched by Wild."

"You can keep to your opinion of the matter and I'll keep to mine," said Jack, rather angrily. "I think we ought to be talking about something else just now. How are we to get out of this house? If we stay here much longer, Jonathan will walk in and take us prisoners."

"Ask yourself," said Blueskin, who was chafed to think Jack had acted so hastily as he had with Steggs. "Ask yourself. Why do you apply to me?"

An angry response was on Jack's lips, but Bess spoke, and turned it aside.

"Do not quarrel now," she said. "I will ask you not to quarrel for my sake, because I believe both of you wish to see me in safety."

"We do, we do," they replied, with one voice.

"Prove it, then, by thinking upon the best means of taking me from here."

"We will."

"I ask your pardon, Jack," said Blueskin; "let the affair for the present be forgotten. We shall doubtless learn soon enough which of us is in the right."

"With all my heart."

"Let us devise our escape."

"We abandon our first idea?"

"Utterly. You see, by this time Newgate-street will be full, and, as you said just now, Wild's men are doubtless set to watch the houses."

"I can't understand the affair altogether."

"In what way?"

"Why did Wild come out on the roof alone?"

"That was strange."

"Very. I heard him calling to his men as he came up the stairs."

"Well."

"Not one replied or made his appearance, nor did there, as you know, during our conflict with him, nor has there now."

"It certainly does seem strange. Now do you know what I always think when I see anything strange in Wild's conduct?"

"No."

"I mean anything that we can't exactly understand."

"Just so; what do you think?"

"I think he is playing some very deep game, indeed, and that it is doubly necessary for us to have our senses awake."

"I am entirely of your opinion there."

"Well, then, let us be careful what we do."

"We must be."

"Now, if we could only ascertain one thing."

"What?"

"Whether the house is watched."

"It can be done."



[THE ESCAPE FROM THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE.]

"How?"

"I will find out myself."

"How?"

"Why I?"

"What makes you stop?"

"Hark!"

As soon as Jack Sheppard uttered the word Hark! his two companions, as well as himself, instantly assumed listening attitudes.

CHAPTER CCXXIX.

JACK SHEPPARD AND HIS FRIENDS HEAR A FOOTSTEP ON THE STAIRS.

THE sound which had caught his quick ear soon increased in loudness, and manifested itself.

It was a footstep on the stairs.

A sneaking, cautious footstep, as though some one was trying to come up some creaking stairs as quietly as possible.

What were our friends to make of this?

They exchanged glances, and then listened again.

Up came the person, nearer and nearer to the attic door.

All three almost held their breath.

At length the footstep reached the threshold of the door.

There it paused.

Then followed a rustling, scratching noise.

Our friends knew what occasioned it.

Some one was feeling for the latch.

They looked towards it.

They saw it raised slowly, and a slight pressure against the door.

But it was held fast shut by the little bolt which Jack had shot into the socket.

The latch was dropped again, and a pause took place in the proceedings of the person outside.

A great deal of secrecy and silence was desired, that was certain

But what could be the motive for the surreptitious attempt to enter the room?

That at present was a mystery.

Time alone would clear it up.

But what was the person outside going to do next?

Was he a friend or foe?

The latter most likely, for what friends had those two fugitives got in all the wide world?

Not one.

By the aid of the candle which was glimmering on the mantle-shelf, they looked in each others' faces as these thoughts passed through their minds.

They were afraid to communicate with each other, except by signs.

Suddenly they were startled by a fresh sound manifesting itself at the door.

"Tap—tap—tap!"

That was the sound.

It was as though some one had struck the door with the extreme points of their fingers, or rather with their nails.

As no notice was taken of it, the tapping was renewed.

Doubtless, like the reader, our friends were unable to tell what to think of this.

The worst of it was, they could not deliberate.

But Blueskin looked at Jack as much as to ask what he thought was best to be done.

Jack responded with a nod, as though he had made up his mind to adopt some plan of action.

At the same time he noiselessly took one step nearer the door.

Then he stooped down, and, with the utmost care, withdrew the little bolt which he had previously taken such pains to shoot into the socket.

His two companions watched his actions eagerly and anxiously.

No audible sound was produced by the withdrawal of the bolt, and this was in some measure due to the fact that, at the moment when Jack drew it back, the person outside, whoever it might be, renewed the tapping on the panel, and this time with greater loudness than before.

Jack rose to his full height.

He put his left hand upon the latch, and slowly lifted it up.

He had his right arm ready for action.

Then, with the greatest suddenness, he pulled the door open.

At the same moment he darted out his right arm, and clutched hold of something.

Without waiting a second to ascertain what it was that he had caught hold of, he, by an exertion of strength, pulled the object of which he had taken hold into the room, and closed the door.

So suddenly was all this done, that Blueskin and Edgworth Bess could scarcely believe that it had taken place.

No alarm had been given.

But they were not long in doubting the reality of what had occurred, for tight in Jack's grasp was the landlord of the lodging-house.

The sudden and summary treatment he had received had filled him with surprise, nor had he yet recovered himself sufficiently to attempt the least resistance.

But, thinking that in all probability it would not be long before he did, Blueskin hastened to give his assistance.

Jack motioned to Edgworth Bess to bolt the door again, so as to secure them from all other intruders.

The heiress understood him, and immediately obeyed the sign.

The landlord was on the floor in a half-sitting half-kneeling posture.

He looked the picture of fright.

Blueskin held him at one side.

Jack Sheppard at the other.

The latter now produced a pistol from his pocket, which he very deliberately cocked.

Byron has very truly said—

It has a sharp quick jar upon the ear,

That cocking of a pistol, when you know

A moment more will bring the sight to bear

Upon your person.

And so the landlord thought, as the changing colour of his countenance fully testified.

Jack, however, was not content with merely cocking the pistol.

He saw the effect which that action had upon the landlord's nerves, and he wished to heighten it as much as possible.

Accordingly he turned the barrel of the pistol round, and pressed it in a very disagreeable manner against the landlord's forehead.

Then, and not till then, did this worthy find his voice.

In a faint tone he gasped out—

"Mercy—mercy!"

"You have need to make such a supplication," said Jack.

"Have mercy upon me."

"Do you feel that?"

"Yes—oh!—yes."

"Do you know what it is?"

"Mercy!"

"No, it is not mercy. It is the muzzle of a loaded pistol pressing against your forehead. I daresay it has made quite a mark. My finger is on the trigger. One touch and your brains would plaster the wall behind you."

"Oh! mercy—mercy!"

This time the tone of voice in which he spoke was a perfect howl.

"Silence," cried Jack. "Another such a sound as that, and you are assuredly a dead man. Do you understand?"

"Yes; but have mercy upon me."

"Your life is in my power, to take it or not as I think fit."

"I know it is, good sir; but have mercy."

"That will depend entirely on yourself."

"On myself?"

"Yes."

"How, good sir? how?"

"I will tell you the one chance you have of saving your miserable life. And yet, what's the good, you won't take it, I know, so I may as well kill you at once."

"No—no. Mercy! I will take the chance. Only let me have the opportunity. I would rather do anything than have my life taken at once."

"I can hear you are a sensible man."

"Yes, good sir. I hope to please you. Have mercy, and give me the chance you spoke of."

"I will. You must tell me at once, and truly, what made you creep upstairs and try to get into this room."

"I, good sir?"

"Yes, you: and understand me, that one of the chances of saving your life depends upon your telling me, not only truly, but quickly. We heard you creep up stairs and lift the latch and try to enter. Now tell us your reason for so doing."

The landlord hesitated and stammered.

"Beware!" said Jack, significantly, and he pressed the pistol yet more closely against his forehead.

"I was sent up, good sir."

"Ah! by whom?"

"One of the gentlemen downstairs."

"What gentlemen? Quick. I am impatient."

"One of Mr. Wild's gentlemen."

"Oh!"

"Which one?"

"Mr. Arnold, sir."

Jack and Blueskin looked at each other uneasily.

"Go on," said the former.

"I have told you sir."

"But not all I want to know. What did Mr. Arnold, as you call him, send you up for?"

"To see whether you were in the attic."

"Oh! indeed. Do you know us?"

"I know two of you."

"Do you really? Then I am afraid you are in possession of a very dangerous piece of knowledge."

"Who am I?"

"Jack Sheppard; and there is a reward of five hundred pounds out for your apprehension."

"That need not interest you, for you will never get it, take my word for that. And who is this on the other side of you?"

"Blueskin."

"How do you know it? Tell me on your life."

"I fancied it was you from the first, and then—"

"Then what?"

"When Mr. Wild's gentlemen came and took possession of the front door, and they told me they were on the watch for you in case you should try and get into the street?"

"Oh! what else?"

"Then I told them about you taking the top attic, and so we agreed that I should come up and see whether you were in it."

"And what else? Tell your whole plot, or your life will pay the forfeit."

"If you were here?"

"Curse you, go on. You tire my patience."

"Oh! there is nothing more."

"Go on, I tell you. I know there is more. One—two three. Will you speak?"

"Oh! dear, yes. Anything to spare my life. I was to come in, you know, if I could, and speak to you, and try to take you downstairs."

"That was it, was it? and then they would have comfortably nabbed us."

"I am afraid they would."

"I don't know whether you are more knave than fool."

"Whichever you like, sir."

"But anyhow you have need to tremble for your life. You have sided with our enemies, and have tried to betray us to them, and your life must pay the penalty."

"No—no! Have mercy. You told me you would spare my life if I told you all. I have told you. Have mercy!"

"Are you sure you have told us all? Reflect a moment and refresh your memory before you reply. Are you sure you have told us all?"

"Yes, I am quite sure."

"Then what excuse have you to offer for your conduct? We came here as lodgers—we paid you liberally for your accommodation; then what right had you to betray us?"

"You forget the reward."

"And it was that which tempted you, was it?"

"It was."

"And nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"It was not because you had any spite against me and wished to see me scragged?"

"Not a bit of it. You never did me any harm, and I don't suppose you ever would."

"Of course I should not."

"I rather like you than otherwise, and I should be as sorry as anybody to know you had come to grief."

"But did not you wish to render Wild a service if you could?"

"Not a bit of it. I don't like him well enough."

"It was only the reward that you wanted?"

"That is all, indeed. You see I am a poor man, and the temptation was greater than I could withstand."

"Well, if that is the state of the case, of course there is some excuse for you."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then you will spare me?"

"That depends upon your conduct. I want to call your attention to something."

"To what?"

"How many of Wild's men are there downstairs?"

"Do you mean in the street as well?"

"Yes."

"About twenty."

"Oh! about twenty. Now, of course, if your little plan had succeeded you would have expected the reward to be shared out among you?"

"Ye-ye-yes."

"You didn't think you would have the whole of the reward to yourself, did you?"

"No, I suppose not."

"Of course not. Now just attend to me for a moment, will you?"

"Oh! yes."

"Now I should think the least that could be done, would be for the reward to be equally divided among you. Shouldn't you?"

"I expect that is what they would want."

"To be sure; and very fair it would be, I take it. Now you said there were twenty of Wild's men downstairs."

"About twenty."

"Well, say there were twenty, counting yourself as one.

Now, if so, it follows that the reward must be divided into twenty portions."

"Yes, but what of that?"

"I will tell you in a moment, if you will pay attention. The reward, you say, is five hundred pounds. Now that, divided by twenty, will give just twenty-five pounds apiece for you."

"I suppose it would."

"Now that to me appears a very trifling sum of money."

"I don't say it mightn't, but it seems a great deal to a poor man with a large family."

"That's right enough, but you don't seem to have included one thing in your calculations."

"What?"

"Why, that you exposed your life—that, indeed, you were more likely to lose it than not. Now, do you mean to tell me that you only estimate your life to be worth twenty-five pounds?"

CHAPTER CCXXX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD COMPEL THE LODGING-HOUSE KEEPER TO CONNIVE AT THEIR ESCAPE.

THIS seemed to be quite a fresh view of the case to the lodging-house keeper, and he looked at Jack with a puzzled air.

"I might not have lost my life," he said, at length.

"But you stood a very good chance of it, for you might be sure we are neither of us the right sort to give in easily, and we should have made a point of shooting you, if we shot no one else."

"Oh! should you?"

"Certainly we should, because we should consider that Wild's men were doing only what they were told, and what they conceived to be their duty, while you travelled out of your way to aid them."

The landlord made no reply to this.

Jack continued.

"Now there is another view of the case which you ought to have taken before you agreed to side with Wild's men. I have put it as being all fair and straightforward. Now we will just suppose that you had succeeded in capturing us, and had not lost your life. In fact, that all had gone on in the most satisfactory manner conceivable, which is not very likely. Still, we will suppose it. Now, do you think that Wild's men would have troubled themselves about your having your share of the reward? Of course they wouldn't. You know, as well as I do, that the first thing they would set about doing would be how to cheat you out of your due, so as to have all the money among themselves."

"I never looked at it in that light," said the landlord.

"I know you didn't, and that is why I am putting the case to you. But you ought to have done before you embarked yourself in such a perilous undertaking. You ought to have considered the matter over."

"I wanted the money."

"And you are sure that was the sole motive?"

"Quite sure."

"Then, you just look here. Suppose now you had come up to us and said Wild's men are downstairs and want you. Now, if I tell them you are here, all I shall get if they catch you is twenty-five pounds. Now, how much will you give me if I show you how to make your escape?"

The landlord had been a good deal startled by what Jack had said to him, but this last supposition thoroughly astonished him.

"I am a dolt—an ass—a blockhead—that's what I am. In fact, I'm more, for I am a d—d fool."

"Just so. That is what I thought, but I hardly liked to say it."

"Well, then, I say it again myself. I am a d—d fool."

"You think it would have answered your purpose best to have tried to make terms with us?"

"Of course I do."

"You might depend we should be willing to give a great deal more than twenty-five pounds if we were allowed to get off. Now, don't you think we should?"

"Think? I am sure you would."

"And so you see, not only would you have got more money, but you would have run no risk of your life what-

ever. Now you see it is in the greatest possible peril, for, if I liked, I could take it this moment."

"But you won't?"

"I don't know that. We have made up our minds not to be caught."

"How shall you escape?"

"That we have to decide, but I wanted to bring you to your proper senses first, and then talk about that afterwards."

"But it is no good thinking about it now, I suppose?"

"Well, not much. You see the case is quite altered, but you know now how it would have been if you had your proper senses about you. But we must dictate the terms. Your life is in our power. Now, what will you do to save it?"

"Do? do? Oh! do? Why, you promised to have mercy if I told you all."

"I know I did, but I didn't promise that I should not take your life, or, if I did, I didn't mean it. Now, then, we will propose some terms to you, and, if you agree to them, your life will be spared, but most certainly not without."

"What are the terms?"

"I will satisfy you. They are simple, and won't take long to tell. You must in some way manage to let us escape from this place. You can do it or not, just as you please, but the moment you refuse, out go your brains, for I should think no more of shooting you than I should of shooting a dog."

"Oh! mercy!"

"You hear what Jack says," said Blueskin, for the first time taking part in the conversation, "so just tell us at once whether you say yes or no."

"I wish I could say yes."

"And what is to prevent you?"

"The thing is impossible."

"How so?"

"Jonathan's men are in the house on guard."

"What of that?"

"You cannot escape."

"Well then, you must die," said Blueskin. "Pull the trigger, Jack, and put the poor fellow out of his misery. Besides, we have got no time to spare, and have wasted too much already."

"Speak," said Jack. "I want to be merciful. Will you help us to escape? Yes or no?"

"Say yes, and I will give you ten pounds into the bargain," said Blueskin, who knew quite as well as Jack that the only chance they had was to get out of the house by the connivance of the landlord, and that was the reason they had taken so much trouble with him as they had.

This offer of Blueskin's to give ten pounds in addition had a marked effect upon the landlord.

Money generally will do away with a great many impossibilities.

He ventured to ask a rather momentous question.

"Have you got the money about you?" he said.

"Of course we have," replied Blueskin. "You don't think we should want you to trust us? Look here."

As he spoke, Blueskin took ten guineas out of his pocket, and jingled them in his hand.

"They are yours," he added, "if you will just show us the way out."

The landlord sighed as he said—

"I wish I could."

"Why can't you?"

"Wild's men."

"Tell them you made a mistake."

"They won't believe me."

"Send them away."

"How could I do that?"

"I leave it to your own ingenuity."

"It's quite impossible."

"Haven't you got a back door of some kind?"

"Oh! yes."

"Do Wild's men guard that?"

"No."

"Then why not let us out of that?"

"Where could you go?"

"Wherever it took us."

"But it won't take you anywhere. You can get out into the yard, to be sure, but how are you to get out of the yard?"

"I don't know. Take us down, and then we will see."

"It's very hazardous."

"Not half so hazardous as your first undertaking. Do you agree to take us into the yard?"

"Yes."

"And without the knowledge of Wild's men?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you will do that, we shall be quite content. You leave the risk to us."

"Very well. If you consent to those terms I do."

"Good. Then the ten guineas are yours. But look you, Mister Landlord, we intend to be very careful of you."

"How careful?"

"Why, that you don't try to play a double game, and after all lead us into the claws of our enemies."

"You need not be afraid."

"Well, perhaps not; but still there is no harm in taking precautions. So, please to understand this. You will not receive the ten guineas until we stand in safety in the yard, and from now until that happy moment I will keep hold of your arm, and Jack will hold the pistol to your forehead in the same pleasant manner as he has done throughout the interview. It will answer a double purpose. It will enable us to place confidence in you, and it will remind you of the fact that your life depends upon your own actions."

"Trust me," said the landlord. "I don't want to see you captured, and I don't want to throw away my life. It won't be a very easy matter, I daresay, but I will try my best to take you into the yard, and then I shall leave you to shift for yourselves."

"Well, then, let that be the understanding, and, to play fair with you, I will give these ten guineas into the hands of this young lady who we have rescued from Wild's house, and she will give them to you as soon as we reach the yard."

The landlord seemed to be well pleased with this arrangement, and at once signified his readiness to take them by endeavouring to rise to his feet.

This our two friends permitted him to do.

Then, at their request, Edgworth Bess unfastened the door and threw it open.

As they had said, Blueskin and Jack still retained their hold upon the person of the landlord, and the latter pressed the pistol against his temples.

"Listen," said Blueskin to Edgworth Bess, "and tell us whether you can hear anything of our foes."

Edgworth Bess went to the top of the stairs, and, leaning over the balusters, listened intently.

"All is well, I think," she said, at length. "I can hear nothing."

"Come on, then. You, Bess, I think, had better follow us. We three will go down together."

It really did seem as though the landlord was quite sincere, and fully intended to do what he had promised, but then he had cogent reasons for his sincerity, since, if he had played false, he would certainly have sacrificed his own life.

In this way, then, they made their way down the narrow attic stairs.

It was impossible for them to walk all three abreast, so the way they managed was this.

Blueskin went first.

He had hold of the landlord's arm, who followed next.

Then came Jack, who had hold of his other hand, and held the pistol to his head.

Edgworth Bess followed her two friends, under the impression that that would be the safest plan for her to adopt.

In this way they proceeded in total darkness, until they reached the landing at the top of the next flight of stairs, and at this point they paused and listened.

But from below there came no sounds indicative of their foes.

They resumed their descent with more confidence.

The house was a very high one, and, as the chamber they had just left was situated at the very top of it, the number of stairs they had to go down was something prodigious.

But they descended them in safety, and, so far as they could tell, without raising any alarm.

At length the landlord said in a whisper—

"We must not go any lower."

"Why not?"
 "This is the first floor, and down them stairs takes you into the hall in which are Jonathan's men."
 "The devil! Then how are we to reach the yard?"
 "I'll show you, but don't speak a word more than you are obliged, and always in the lowest possible whisper, for fear we should be overheard."

"All right; but show us how to reach the yard."
 "I will. Just on your right hand there is a door; knock at it very quietly."

Bess executed the order.
 In the profound darkness that was upon the landing-place, Edgworth Bess would never have been able to see the door alluded to, only within the room into which it opened was a light, and as the door fitted badly in its frame, a line of light could be seen running completely round it.

With this for a guide, Edgworth Bess easily found the door, and she tapped lightly upon the panel of it, according to the landlord's direction.

The other three stood close beside her, and waited for their summons to be responded to.

"I'll speak as soon as they open the door. You will find it all right."

"We will trust you so far."
 A step could now be heard approaching, and the next moment the door was flung open.

A woman appeared upon the threshold.
 She carried a lighted candle in her hand.
 She looked rather alarmed when she saw so large a party, and seemed very much inclined to scream.

Probably she would have done so had not the familiar tones of the landlord's voice struck upon her ear, and then she surmised that all was well.

"It's all right, Mrs. Perry," said the landlord, in a very low voice. "Let me and my friends come into your room, and we will tell you what we want."

The woman addressed as Mrs. Perry, and who occupied the first-floor back, made no demur to this, but stepped aside and allowed the little party to enter.

Edgworth Bess closed the door in a moment, and stood with her back towards it, and then Mrs. Perry discovered that the landlord was held as a prisoner.

Before, however, she could make any remark upon the subject, the landlord spoke, and from what he said it appeared very clear that he meant to keep faith with our friends.

"This is no time for explanations, Mrs. Perry," he said; "I will, though, tell you all by-and-bye. In the meantime, take my word for it that everything is quite right and proper. Time is precious. We don't want your help in any way that I know of, so long as you do not obstruct us."

The woman made no reply to this, but stood stock still with her eyes wide open with astonishment, until at length, her astonishment increasing the longer she reflected and the more she saw, her limbs refused to any longer support her, and she dropped down upon a chair, which providentially happened to be behind her.

In the meanwhile the landlord proceeded to explain his intentions, not by speech but actions, and our friends soon comprehended by what means they were to reach the yard.

They were simple enough.

CHAPTER CCXXXI.

REVERTS TO THE ACTIONS OF JONATHAN WILD AFTER HE FELL OFF THE ROOF-TOPS INTO THE WATER-TANK.

As we have before stated, Mrs. Perry occupied that room which was always designated as the first-floor back.

From this our readers will be at no loss to know its exact position in the house, and therefore further explanation would be unnecessary.

Since the landlord spoke, Blueskin and Jack released their hold, and the latter also restored his pistol to his pocket, because, whatever doubts he might have had about his good faith, they were now completely dissipated.

The landlord then walked straight to the window of the room, which, of course, looked out into the yard.

Slowly, and as noiselessly as possible, he opened it.

He would not have accomplished that feat so silently as he did if the window had been constructed as most windows are now-a-days, that is to say, to rise in a sash.

This opened like a folding door, as attic windows are sometimes made to do.

As soon as this was done, he turned to Jack and whispered—

"You will be able to do more than I thought. Well, I am glad of it. You will escape from your foes easy enough."

"That is good news. How shall we do it?"

"Well, down there is the yard. It is not above ten feet below us, and I should think one of you could drop into it easily enough."

"Yes, but"—

"Stop a minute. I know what you were going to say, but just wait until I have done, and then you will be spared the necessity of speaking."

"Go on, then."

"One of you will be able to drop it."

"Oh! yes, easy enough. If it is no lower down than you say, it could be dropped easily enough."

"Very well, that's what I thought. Now one of you had better do it as speedily as may be. When you get down in the yard, look about you and you will see a ladder"—

"All right!" cried Jack, "I understand. I'll go."

"Stop—stop. Hear me out."

"I know what you're going to say."

"No, you don't. Be quiet."

"What is it, then?"

"By the aid of this ladder the other two will be able to get down easily enough, won't they?"

"Oh! yes."

"Very good. Now do you see that wall opposite?"

"Yes; but it's as much as I can do."

"Never mind, so that you do see it. Do you know what place that is that's on the other side of it?"

"No. What is it?"

"Newgate-market. Now do you understand? When you are in the yard, put that ladder up against the wall, and get over it. You will then have only yourselves to blame if you do not escape this time."

"Thanks," said Blueskin. "Thanks to you, we shall indeed be free. Bess, give him the ten guineas; and, landlord, I'll tell you what you shall do. Call, the day after to-morrow, at Tumposki's, the Jew's, in Little Earl-street, Seven Dials, and he will give you fifty guineas on my account, so you won't be a loser by this night's work."

The eyes of the lodging-house keeper glistened when he heard these words.

He was avaricious, but it was poverty that made him so.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked, not able to believe his own ears.

"I do, and if you will recollect the place, and call at the time appointed, you will receive the money all right enough."

"Then I am sorry I did not help you at first."

"Never mind that now. It's too late to regret. It's a good job things are no worse. You see you will get more than twice as much as you could have hoped to receive even if Jonathan's men had acted square with you, which they certainly would not."

"I'll come, and I'll take care you are not seen. You quite understand what I mean."

"Quite. I only hope Jonathan has not been cunning enough to post some of his men in the Market."

"I don't think he has done so, though he has posted them all about the street, so as to pounce upon you the moment you make your appearance, so it will be necessary for you to be very careful."

"Trust to us."

At this moment Edgworth Bess, who had continued standing with her back to the door, gave a slight cry of alarm.

She ran towards the window at which her two protectors stood.

"What is the matter?" they asked.

"Quick! oh! quick. Be quick!"

"What did you hear?"

"Some one, or some ones, are creeping stealthily up the stairs. I could not hear their footsteps, but only the rustling of their clothes."

"Ha! then Quilt and his men have grown suspicious of my long absence. You have no time to lose. Perhaps in another moment they will attack us. Who is going to drop into the yard?"

"I will," said Jack.

"Very well; perhaps you will be the best, as you are such a light weight. Don't make any more noise than you can help. We will help to lower you through the window."

"Thanks; I shall manage it."

Jack Sheppard got out of the window feet foremost, and the landlord and Blueskin held him by his hands, and so let him down.

At the suggestion of Blueskin, Jack did not shift his grasp to the window-sill, and drop after holding by that, but they fairly lowered him down, he keeping hold of their hands until they hung half-way out of window.

Jack had then only a few inches to drop, which he did noiselessly, and without creating any alarm.

Without pausing, the moment he felt himself upon his feet he looked round for the ladder, as he had been directed, and espied it lying down at the foot of the wall.

It was a short, light ladder, and yet quite sufficient to answer the purpose required.

With more strength than any one would have thought he possessed, Jack raised the ladder, and placed it against the window-sill.

He was not a moment too soon.

From somewhere in the upper regions of the house there came a horrible cry, which was immediately responded to by another.

Then followed the rushing of many footsteps down the stairs.

"That's Wild, I would stake my life!" said Blueskin, the moment he heard the hideous cry. "We are found out."

"Then the best thing you can do is to make haste. Here's the ladder. Down with you."

"I will go first," said Blueskin, "and then you assist the lady to follow me."

"Very good; I'll see to that. Make haste."

Blueskin got on the ladder and descended it a little way, then Bess was placed upon it, and he assisted her to the best of his ability.

Jack stood at the bottom of the ladder to steady it during their descent.

But we must leave them for a moment, while we take just a passing glance at Jonathan Wild, and explain the cause of the cry which Blueskin felt so certain was uttered by the thief-taker.

It will be recollected that we left Wild in rather an awkward predicament.

After his struggle with Jack and Blueskin he had rolled down the tiles, and gone with full force against a time-worn parapet, which gave way before the sudden shock with which his bulky body went against it.

Then, amid a mass of masonry, he had fallen down, not on to the ground, which was some fifty or sixty feet beneath him, but into a large open cistern, which was nearly full of water.

The blow upon the head which he had received from the butt-end of Blueskin's pistol, for a moment completely stunned him.

But the thief-taker's head was made of uncommonly hard materials, as the numberless blows it had withstood would testify.

So when he went with that awful crash against the parapet, it went a long way towards restoring him to consciousness.

The sudden immersion in the cold water completed the process.

Had his insensibility continued, he would certainly have been drowned in that cistern.

As it was, having partial possession of his faculties, though his brain was somewhat confused, he plunged and tumbled about till he got out of the water.

This was accomplished by standing up on his feet, when the water in the tank reached up to his breast.

Then he commenced the most horrible ululation which could possibly be conceived.

The roaring of the most ferocious wild beast would have sunk into insignificance in comparison with it.

He continued this little amusement until his powers failed him.

And not till then did he make the discovery that the monstrous howling he had set up did not aid him in the least.

But, when he acquired this piece of knowledge, he set

about doing something else that would aid him with all the speed he could.

Jonathan Wild was a man gifted with uncommon energies, and it is much to be pitied that he did not direct them in some useful pursuit.

He was, indeed, indomitable, never allowing himself to be daunted by the most adverse occurrences.

Accordingly, having ceased howling, he looked about him, and then perceived what he might have perceived long before, if he had only had the sense to look.

This was, that there was a window just on a level with the tank.

The window opened into one of the rooms in his own house.

So immediately was this over the tank, that, had any one been within the room which it illuminated, they would have been able to dip water out of it with the greatest ease.

Jonathan's gratification knew no bounds when he saw that window, and he inwardly blessed the friendly architect who had had the forethought to place it in so excellent and so useful a situation.

Before he attempted to get through it, however, he swilled his head and face well with cold water.

This done, he made a frantic dash at the latticed case-ment, and pulled it open.

Another moment and he was standing within the room.

He could not subdue the utterance of the burst of triumphant laughter which came to his lips as he did so.

But he did not waste time.

Hurrying to the door, he threw it open, and once more hastily ran across the landing to the foot of the attic stairs.

But, in his haste, he forgot all about the body of Steggs which had fallen downstairs.

It lay upon the landing.

We say it because it was scarcely possible for any one to survive such a wound as Steggs had received, and certainly impossible if skilful and surgical aid was not immediately administered.

The body of Steggs, then, lay extended upon the landing not far from the foot of the attic stairs, without the least signs of motion.

Hurrying forward, Jonathan caught his foot against the prostrate form, and, unable to recover his lost equilibrium, he fell heavily over it.

The stairs were placed just so as to receive his unfortunate head, which came down upon them with such a crack that it made the whole house echo and tremble again.

It was responded to by a deep groan which came from the lips of Steggs, who was suffering great anguish.

Jonathan Wild lay for a moment quite as still as the body over which he had fallen.

Then he sprang to his feet.

His first impulse was to salute the body over which he had fallen with half-a-dozen heavy kicks, each one of which was followed with a groan from the lips of the wounded man.

But so far from having any humanising effect upon Wild, he drank them in like music.

Then, blinded with rage and pain—his body aching in every joint—his head seeming as though it would split—he rushed up the attic stairs.

With desperate fury, and guided by that instinct by which madmen and drunkards are governed, he reached the foot of the ladder leading to the trap-door.

Up this he went without making one false step—over the parapet, passing by unremoved the scene of his late accident, and all the while heaping the most horrible curses upon the heads of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard.

Still under the guidance of the instinct to which we have adverted, he reached the window opening into the attic of the lodging-house.

No sooner, however, had he crawled in and given a glance round the empty chamber, than Quilt Arnold, followed by several of his men, rushed in.

Then Jonathan had uttered that cry which had so startled the fugitives upon the first-floor, and which made Blueskin quite certain that their arch enemy was once more upon their track.

A few words passed between Quilt Arnold and his ferocious master.

Wild cursed again, and then the whole party rushed down the stairs.

His long absence had made Quilt Arnold suspect that the landlord had played him false, and the first glance he cast into the empty attic changed that suspicion into conviction.

On reaching the first landing, they dashed open the door that came first to their hand.

They were at the window instantly.

The first thing they caught sight of was the wall opposite.

At first this was a ladder.

On the top of the wall was a figure.

Two more were ascending.

"Fire!" roared Wild, as he saw what was taking place, "fire! curse you all. Fire!"

He drew a pistol from his own pocket, and cocking it, pulled the trigger, but no explosion followed.

The priming had got wet while he was in the cistern.

CHAPTER CCXXXII.

JACK SHEPPARD, BLUESKIN, AND EDGWORTH BESS GET INTO NEWGATE-MARKET, BUT ARE UNABLE TO FIND THE HORSES IN WARWICK-LANE.

BUT Quilt and the remainder of the band had got their weapons in better order, so Wild's command was followed by a sheet of flame and a tremendous report.

The amount of damage done could not, however, be ascertained, nor did they make the attempt, for, directly the discharge had taken place, Wild commanded his men to follow him down the stairs—his intention being to reach the yard of the house.

This he would have no difficulty in doing, so we will leave him and once more turn our attention to the proceedings of those in whom the reader must feel a much greater degree of interest.

Blueskin and Edgworth Bess reached the foot of the ladder in safety, and then, without delay, it was placed against the wall, on the other side of which, as the landlord had told them, was Newgate-market—at that time a different place to what it is now, for the part we are describing was destroyed by fire very many years ago.

Jack Sheppard went first up the ladder, and in a minute or two was on the top of the wall.

He was then rejoiced to find that there was a shed in the market, the highest portion of the roof of which was about a foot beneath him.

He did not hesitate to stand upon this, and while in this position he held the ladder firmly at the top.

Blueskin did the same at the bottom, and then Edgworth Bess commenced her perilous ascent.

Dread of being captured by her enemies lent her strength and courage, and she went up the ladder step by step without the least accident.

Seeing this, Blueskin, knowing how precious time was, conceived it unnecessary to continue standing at the foot of the ladder any longer, so he, too, commenced to climb.

Such was the position of affairs when Wild gave the order to fire.

Jack heard that order given, and his heart sank within him, but fortunately Edgworth Bess was almost on a level with where he stood.

Rendered desperate by the peril with which she was menaced, Jack seized her by the arms and drew her rapidly and somewhat roughly over the wall on to the roof of the shed.

He was only just in time.

Almost before he had drawn her over there came the discharge of the pistols.

They felt as well as heard the bullets go whistling over their heads.

But they were unhurt.

Blueskin, however, was not so lucky.

He was on the ladder, about a couple of feet from the top, when the volley was fired.

He had no resource but to remain still.

A sharp, stinging sensation made him aware that he had been hit in his right leg.

It was a thousand wonders he did not lose his footing, but he retained it, and continued climbing rapidly to the top of the wall.

He called out to Jack, and found him on the shed we have described.

Here Blueskin followed him, and the first thing he did was to draw up the ladder out of the yard, partly because he thought it might be useful to them in assisting them to descend, and also because it would be debarring Wild from a ready means of following them.

The roof of the shed was rather precipitous, and it was with difficulty that Jack and Edgworth Bess retained their positions upon it.

"Are you hurt?" was Blueskin's first question.

"No," was the reply uttered by both his companions in one breath. "Are you?"

"I am afraid I am."

"Where?"

"In the leg."

"Is it serious?"

"I can hardly tell, but I hope not. It bleeds very freely, and one of the first things I do must be to bandage it up."

"Wait till we get down on the ground," said Jack.

"Let me have the ladder, and I will place it ready."

"It is here, lying beside me."

"All right, I have it. You look to Edgworth Bess for a moment. I have great hopes now that we shall get off in safety, without any further hurt."

"I trust so."

"That's it."

These last words were spoken by Jack in reference to the ladder, which, to his satisfaction, he found was plenty long enough to reach to the floor of the market.

He was again the first to descend.

But he was down in a moment.

"All right," he cried; "follow me as quickly as you can."

"I can manage by myself, I think," said Edgworth Bess to Blueskin; "but, with your wounded leg, how shall you be able to descend?"

"Never mind me, I will manage somehow. I am getting pretty used to being knocked about, but, as for you, why, of course, that is quite another matter."

Edgworth Bess, without much aid from Blueskin, reached the floor of the market.

Our old friend bore the pain and inconvenience of his wound like a martyr.

He managed to slip down the ladder somehow.

"Now," he said, "you must just wait a moment while I bandage my wound, because, if I do not, not only shall I get weak from loss of blood, but I shall leave such a track behind me, that Wild will be able to follow us blind-fold."

"I'll bind it up for you," said Jack, and, as he spoke, he pulled off his voluminous neckcloth.

It was already in the shape of a bandage, so he had nothing more to do than to tie it tightly round his comrade's leg.

Blueskin could tell there was no bone broken.

The bullet had struck him in the fleshy part of the thigh.

Jack put the bandage on very skilfully, and by drawing it tight he was able to stop the bleeding entirely.

Before the hemorrhage had been copious, for the bullet had gone in at one side and out at the other; but perhaps this was better than if it had lodged in the wound.

"Now, Jack," said Blueskin, "I am all right, and shall do very well. The next thing now is to get out of the market with all speed. I should not be a bit surprised if we were to find Wild waiting for us now at the gate in Warwick-lane."

"He can scarcely have had time to reach there yet, I should think, Blue."

"Well, perhaps he hasn't. Clearly, we must get out of here as soon as we can, or else we shall be taken like rats in a trap, for Wild could easily surround the place."

"Do you know the nearest way out?" asked Jack, "because, if you do, lead the way."

"Follow me. I know exactly where we are. Two minutes will bring us to the archway in Warwick-lane."

"Where," said Jack, "I hope we shall find our horses waiting for us."

"So do I. We have been much longer, though, than we expected. Still, I trust all will be well."

Blueskin, in spite of his wounded leg, set off at so rapid a pace through the dark and fetid alleys in the market-

place, that Jack and Edgworth Bess had much ado to keep up with him.

But when the large archway which leads out into Warwick-lane was reached, he slackened his speed, and approached cautiously, for about this spot he more than half expected some of his enemies would be lurking.

The place was in deep darkness, which was a favourable circumstance.

Stealthily, then, taking care not to speak to each other, nor to tread too heavily, they fairly got to the gate, so that another step would take them into the street.

Then Jack deemed it prudent to reconnoitre.

He glided out into the street like a shadow, leaving his two companions beneath the archway.

The horses would be at the Newgate-street end of Warwick-lane, so that was the direction he took.

Of course, if they were there all would be well. They would all three mount, and be miles out of the way before Jonathan was ready to pursue them.

But as he crept along the narrow thoroughfare, Jack recollected what the lodging-house keeper had said with reference to Wild having set a watch in the street.

It might be that they had found the three horses, and guessed the object for which they were provided.

If so, our friends would be very awkwardly situated indeed.

It behoved Jack, at any rate, to be unusually cautious.

He had not to go many steps to reach the top of Warwick-lane.

By the top, of course, we mean the upper part of it, for Jack did not go to the corner of Newgate-street.

But he went far enough to be able to see into that thoroughfare.

There were certainly no horses visible in that direction.

Jack's heart sank within him.

He had calculated most fully upon finding the horses waiting for them, but now they were gone, what were they to do.

He turned back with the faint hope that he might find them at the other end of the street.

But that hope turned out fallacious.

The street was certainly empty.

From what cause?

Had the Jew failed to perform his part of the agreement, which was to have three horses at the place mentioned in waiting for them?

Or, had the horses been sent there, and had they been seized by Jonathan Wild's men?

To neither of these questions could Jack return a satisfactory reply.

He was quite satisfied the horses were not there, so he returned to the archway of the market in order to communicate the disagreeable intelligence to Blueskin.

But he was not much surprised. He had all along feared that this would prove to be the case.

"We must make the best of our way from this place, Jack," he said. "It won't do to stop here another moment."

"If we do, it will only be at a very great risk indeed. Now the horses are gone, we must try to do without them."

"But how?"

"Never fear, we shall hit upon some expedient before long."

"Our position is very critical."

"I know it. Are there any of Wild's men about?"

"I could not see any."

"They may be lurking somewhere. I wonder what Jonathan is about."

"I don't know; but, Blueskin, a thought has just struck me."

"With reference to making our escape?"

"With reference to a secure hiding-place, where Jonathan would never think of looking for us."

"That is much the same thing; but whereabouts is this hiding-place you speak of?"

"Follow me, and I will tell you as we go along towards it. The idea is so excellent, that I am sure you will agree to it at once."

"Well, I trust to you, because time is so precious."

"Come along, then, as fast as you are able. I will take charge of Edgworth Bess."

"Oh! Jack, when will the perils of this night be over?"

"I wish I could tell you," replied Sheppard, as he took his fair companion by the hand, and hastened with her down Warwick-lane, in the direction of Amen-corner. I trust our perils will quite cease in less than a quarter-of-an-hour from now."

"I trust so, Jack, for I am so exhausted that I cannot keep up much longer, even if my life depended on it."

"I am sure what you have already gone through must have fatigued you greatly. I am in hopes, however, of being able to take you to a place where you will have an opportunity of enjoying some hours undisturbed rest."

"I shall be thankful for it. Do you know, Jack, this long illness I have had has left me so very weak. Indeed, I am surprised I have kept up so well. Where are you going to take me?"

"To St. Paul's."

"St. Paul's?"

"Yes, St. Paul's Cathedral. What do you think of that?"

"I should never have thought of hiding there."

"It is a capital place," said Blueskin, "and I vote we make there with all speed. Why, Jonathan would hunt all London over and never think of looking for us there."

"So I think."

"Which way shall we go?"

"Round the corner into Paternoster-row, and then you will see another turning nearly opposite, which will bring you out just where you want to be."

"I know, in St. Paul's Churchyard."

"Just so. But quick. I can hear some one approaching, and it will never do for us to be perceived."

While this little dialogue was going forward, our three friends turned the corner of Warwick-lane into Paternoster-row, and across this thoroughfare down a narrow passage, from which they emerged upon the north side of St. Paul's Churchyard.

And now before them was that colossal structure which makes itself so conspicuous above the many buildings which surround it.

"Jack," said Blueskin, pausing suddenly, "yours was a good idea of hiding in St. Paul's, and I don't suppose we should ever be found; but then there is a great difficulty in the way."

"What is it?"

"Why, how are we to get inside the doors of the cathedral?—they will all be closed."

"I know that."

"Then how shall you get in?"

"Easily enough. Don't you recollect how they have been at work repairing one end of it for ever so many months past. Well, that is where I mean to get in. I am sure it can be done."

"Ah! well, perhaps it might. But until you mentioned it, I had quite forgotten the repairs were going on that you spoke of."

"I recollected. We shall have rather an awkward job to get over the palings, but I think we shall find some scaffolding that will enable us to do it."

"We shall have to be very quick, too, about it, because if any one saw us climbing over, the whole affair would get wind at once, which would vex me exceedingly, for I should think it a great pity to have such a good hiding-place discovered. When we get fairly inside, we shall be able to talk over what had best be done."

CHAPTER CCXXXIII

OUR THREE FRIENDS GET INSIDE ST. PAUL'S, BUT FIND THEIR PERILS ARE BY NO MEANS OVER.

THIS was so evident a fact, that those who heard it did not think it called for a reply.

The three fugitives hurried along close to the palings of the churchyard, looking about them for the scaffolding of which Jack had spoken.

The latter led the way.

As he had correctly stated, during the past few months some alterations and repairs were in progress at the east end of the cathedral.

They were now approaching completion, but still it was probable enough some crevice could be found through which they would be able to effect an entrance.

The scaffolding was at length reached.



[JONATHAN WILD IS CONFRONTED BY A STRANGE APPARITION ON THE RUINED BRIDGE.]

Several of the tall iron palisades had been removed, and the poles and planks projected for some distance into the roadway.

"Here we are," said Jack, "and I think we shall find it easier to get in than ever we could have hoped for. Look here!"

As he spoke, Jack pointed to a place which certainly looked as though it would take them into the churchyard without any trouble.

"I will go first," said Jack, "and if it is all right, you can follow me."

Jack had fully expected that they would have had to climb over the palings, but this, which would have been very awkward for Edgworth Bess, was happily obviated.

It was a space between some timber which Jack had found.

The place looked very dark, but without the least fear or hesitation Jack entered.

But scarcely had he passed from the sight of his two companions than their ears were assailed with loud cries,

and the trampling of many feet, while now and then a clash as of weapons would make itself heard.

The sounds looked very much like pursuit.

The direction from which they came was the same as they had taken, and neither Bess nor Blueskin had any doubt that it was their enemy, Wild, who was upon their track.

Under this impression, then, they did not wait for Jack to return, nor until they heard him call to them from within the recess, but entered it at once, and called to Jack in a low tone themselves.

Their words were responded to immediately, for, owing to the darkness of the place, and the intricate manner in which the scaffold-poles had been set, Jack had not penetrated very far.

"Jonathan is close here," said Blueskin to Jack Sheppard. "We heard him, with a whole troop at his heels, coming along the churchyard. What is to be done?"

"Confound him!" said Jack. "How can he have managed to dog our footsteps?"

"That I have no idea; but what shall we do? Hark, here he comes."

"We can do nothing but remain where we are," said Jack, "and trust to his passing this place and not finding us."

"But that is a very slender chance."

"I know it is, but it is our only one. Keep still, or he will hear us. We can do nothing but trust to his going by."

This was trusting to a very frail thing indeed, and so Jack and Blueskin both felt, for Jonathan Wild was a man possessed of no ordinary skill in hunting down human game.

Some trifling thing, that would escape the observation of most persons, would indicate to him that our friends were hiding there, and if he did take such an idea into his head, their case would be a deplorable one indeed, for what would be easier than for the thief-taker to surround the scaffolding and either slay them or take them prisoners?

They heard him and his ruthless band come on.

Instantaneously they crouched down, as though by so doing they would reduce the chances of their being found, and with bated breath they looked out from their place of concealment.

The next moment Wild and his band came in sight.

The thief-taker himself, in a shocking plight, led the way.

His apparel was drenched with water and besmeared with unctuous mud. Large rents appeared here and there, while down his face trickled several little rivulets of blood.

His appearance was ghastly and horrible in the extreme, and sufficient to strike terror into the boldest heart.

Several of the men behind him carried torches.

They held them high in the air, and they diffused a bright, ruddy light all around them, and by the aid of this light Wild and his men looked about in search of the three fugitives.

On they came—along the narrow, broken pavement of the churchyard, until they came opposite to the scaffolding in which our friends were concealed; another moment and they would have passed it, when suddenly Wild called "Halt!" and the whole throng came to an immediate standstill.

The hearts of the three friends sunk within them when they heard this, and they mentally gave themselves up for lost.

Still they had the prudence and the presence of mind to remain quite still, and not to utter an ejaculation, or, in fact, do anything calculated to put Jonathan upon their track.

From where they were concealed they could both hear and see the proceedings of their enemies.

"Halt!" cried Wild, again; "and listen some of you. Who can hear their footsteps? Silence! Hark!"

The whole band now became intensely still, and every member of it listened with the utmost eagerness for any sound which they could construe into the footsteps of their prey.

But all was still.

Not one of them had ears quick enough to catch the sound they so much desired to hear.

"Curses on it all!" said Wild. "We are here just two minutes too late. They have come this way, I am certain, and whether they have gone up Cheapside, or down St. Martin's-le-Grand, is more than I can tell. We must trust to chance. We must not wait here, however. Down St. Martin's-le-Grand is the most likely way they would go. Forward—forward!"

Upon receipt of this order the little troop put itself in motion, and away they went in the direction Wild had mentioned.

That he should halt just where he did was not at all extraordinary, because, as may be gathered from the thief-taker's words, a choice of roads was spread out before him, and he wanted some better guide than probability to direct him as to which he ought to take.

Our readers may imagine with what joy our friends listened to these words uttered by their enemy, and learned that he had gone upon a wrong scent.

Jack drew a long breath as he said—

"That is one more narrow escape. Thank goodness he has gone!"

"He has. I made sure he halted just where he did because he knew where we had hidden ourselves."

"But you now see how wrong it would have been for us to expose ourselves in any way."

"It would, indeed!"

"What are we to do next?" asked Blueskin.

"I do not know what we can do better than follow up our original idea of taking refuge in the cathedral."

"Do you think it will be best?"

"Decidedly, if we can effect an entrance."

"Why not be off while we have the chance?"

"I have thought of that, and there are two or three reasons why we should not."

"What are they?"

"One is that Edgworth Bess is thoroughly exhausted, and almost incapable of making any further exertion, and the other is Jonathan would be too soon upon our track. You may depend he will soon find he is on a wrong scent, before he goes far down St. Martin's-le-Grand, and then he will be back upon us."

"Those are too very good reasons, Jack."

"And not only that, Jonathan Wild would never think of looking for us in St. Paul's. Now, if we were once to get in there, the place is large enough to hide us without much fear of our being found by any one entering it. It will be necessary to talk over matters and re-arrange our plans. Now, that can be done here more safely than anywhere else, and Edgworth Bess will rest herself at the same time."

"Your reasons are very good, Jack, and quite convince me that what you propose is the best thing to be done, so make your way into the churchyard at once."

Jack did not require to be told twice to do this. He crawled among the scaffolding, and at length fairly stood on the piece of ground which surrounds the old cathedral.

To this place his two companions followed him, and then they set about looking for some breach through which they could obtain an entrance.

For a long time they were unsuccessful, but at length they found a place just large enough for them to crawl through, and no more.

They were particularly careful not to disturb anything, for they by no means wished the workmen to see any signs of their having been about that spot.

In a few minutes more, then, Jack and his two companions were within the sacred edifice.

Even in daylight it is, in many places, shrouded in semi-darkness, but now, on a dark night, the darkness was intense.

For some moments after they got in, all three stood profoundly still and listened.

But no sound came to their ears.

In that place a silence which cannot be described prevailed. The very air itself seemed to be hushed.

Strange sensations will creep over every one upon entering St. Paul's, but how much more must those sensations be intensified when the place is entered at night?

The three fugitives were by no means exempt from this influence, and they instinctively hushed their voices to a whisper.

A very little while served to show them that they had the place all to themselves, and then they had the confidence to advance a few paces.

"Jack!" said Blueskin.

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"Here."

"I cannot see you."

"Nor I you."

"Are you safe, Edgworth Bess?"

"Quite. I have hold of Jack's hand."

"All is well, then."

"I hope so."

"But, Jack."

"What?"

"Tell me, what are we to do in this place? It will not do to stand here, nor will it be very safe to walk in the dark."

"There is no doubt about that."

"Then what are we to do?"

"Have you the means of procuring a light?"

"Oh! yes; I never fail to carry them about me. But then——"

"What?"

"I am afraid it would be rather hazardous to exhibit a light here."

"I suppose so; and yet I don't know, after all. Such a light as would be sufficient to answer our purpose would only look like a tiny twinkling star in this huge place."

"That's very true."

"I should say, light up by all means."

"I will take your advice. At first sight it looked a dangerous thing to do, but when you come to think of it, a great deal of that danger vanishes."

With these words on his lips, Blueskin felt in his pockets, and presently produced the means of obtaining a light.

These were a bottle of phosphorus and a wax taper.

The latter was small in size.

When it was lighted and the flame of the wick had properly burnt up, Jack's words were found to be quite true, for the light did seem like a tiny star, and it scarcely dispersed the darkness for a foot around it.

Still they were able to see the ground beneath their feet and avoid running against any object which might be in their path.

By keeping on in a straight line they came to that portion of the cathedral in which service was generally performed.

Edgworth Bess was very much fatigued. She did not complain, but Jack could tell as much by the way she leaned upon his arm; indeed, as they walked, he almost carried her.

Upon reaching the place we have mentioned, Jack looked about him as well as he was able, and saw that the pews in which the people sat during the celebration of the service were very large, and roomy, and comfortable.

They were moreover very comfortably cushioned—indeed, everything that would conduce to comfort had been done to them.

This gave Jack an idea.

"Blueskin," he said, "we may as well remain where we now are for a few hours. Bess could lie down on the seat in one of these pews and have a good sleep, while we watched over her. We should have to move at daylight, that would be all."

"I have no objection," said Blueskin. "I don't suppose you would find a better place if you were to search St. Paul's over, and, as you say, we could watch."

This being agreed to, the door of one of the pews was opened by Jack, and Edgworth Bess entered.

Poor girl, she was quite overcome, and sank on the seat with a deep sigh.

Jack closed the door and left her to herself, bidding her good night, and desiring her to get as much sleep as she possibly could, and he would see that she was menaced with no danger.

Edgworth Bess promised all that he asked of her, and then Blueskin and Jack Sheppard crossed the aisle and entered another pew, which was precisely opposite to the one of which Edgworth Bess had taken possession.

Jack Sheppard and Blueskin agreed to watch and sleep by turns, and also to defer all further conversation relative to their future operations until such time as Edgworth Bess would be able to take part in the consultation.

And so, during the remainder of that eventful night, the three fugitives remained undisturbed beneath the sacred roof of St. Paul's Cathedral, while Jonathan Wild was fatiguing himself both bodily and mentally by a useless search after them.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD MEDITATES A LITTLE UPON THE FATE OF HIS AFFAIRS.

It was, in fact, about an hour before dawn that a party of men, about a dozen in number, crept wearily down Newgate-street in the direction of the prison.

They were no other than Jonathan Wild's band, returning from their fruitless search after the three fugitives.

For hours had the thief-taker kept up the hunt, but it was all in vain, he could not find the least trace of those he sought.

In a frame of mind by no means to be envied, he marched on, with his troop of men following close at his heels.

Nothing but fatigue, however, and total inability to proceed, would have had the effect of causing Jonathan to relinquish his search until he had succeeded. But, like his janizaries, he was mortal, and more sensible of fatigue than he would have wished to be.

Jonathan Wild was not the man he had been.

All who came into contact with him could see that.

It was not that his mind was less powerful and full of energy than it was of old,—on the contrary, it seemed to have been endowed with fresh strength.

But his body failed him.

That was his weak point.

Originally he had been gifted with a constitution which might be truly termed of iron. Few men ever had a stronger. But he abused his strength, and the wonder was that it had kept up so long and so well as it had.

The numerous wounds he had received upon almost every part of his body had produced great debilitation. For a long time he had withstood their effects, and the huge libations of brandy he was in the habit of taking had imparted for a time a fictitious strength, but every time the reaction came, it left him weaker than before.

But, on this occasion, the first thing he did was to demand brandy, and when the fiery fluid was brought him, he drank such a quantity that a spectator would have been filled with astonishment. It was real good brandy, too, such as had never passed through the publican's hands, but as it had come from the distillery, and very many degrees over proof.

In a moment—before, indeed, he took the bottle from his lips—the brandy seemed to circulate through every vein and artery in his body, and for the instant he felt himself in possession of his pristine strength.

He laboured under the delusion that he was better.

Still not even the brandy which he drank would restore rest to his weary and aching bones. Many a man would have been laid up for a month by such a tumble from the roof-tops as he had had, and yet we have seen what he has done since.

But the limit of his endurance was reached, and he was obliged to succumb.

Without a word to any one (for he was incompetent even to curse his men), he made his way upstairs, and entering a bed-room, he staggered to the bed, threw himself upon it, and endeavoured to sleep.

But for a long time he tried in vain.

He was almost too tired for sleep to come to him. His brain throbbed—his bones, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, ached excruciatingly—and where the skin had been abraded and dirt rubbed into the wound, he suffered a terrible smarting torment.

But at length Jonathan Wild fell into a deep sleep—exhausted nature was at last having her due.

In the very next room to that in which Wild thus lay sleeping, there also lay another person, whose condition was by far more desperate than his.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the individual to whom allusion is made is no other than the unfortunate Steggs, who unluckily fell a victim to the blind suspicions of Jack Sheppard.

He was extended on the bed, looking as lifeless as any one well could.

Some one in the house had done him that kindness, and there their assistance ceased, considering that all had been done that was necessary.

The reader must be aware, without being expressly told so, that Steggs was quite guiltless of the crime which Jack Sheppard laid to his charge.

He had not the slightest intention of betraying him to Wild, and when he descended the stairs, it was for the purpose stated by Edgworth Bess, namely, to ascertain whether Jonathan had returned.

He found he had done so, and, moreover (than that, that he had tracked Jack Sheppard to where he was.

No sooner did he learn this, than he listened upstairs to communicate the intelligence to Jack, and urge him to make all possible speed.

We have seen how he did so, and we have also seen how Jack Sheppard allowed his dislike for the man to triumph over his judgment, and so he gave him the desperate wound we have described.

It was a great wonder it was not at once fatal, or that the fall and the kicks Jonathan bestowed upon him while on the landing did not conspire to produce that

effect. But no, Steggs still lived—there are some natures extremely tenacious of life, and who will, in a manner of speaking, die a dozen deaths.

So Steggs, although insensible, still lived.

He was no favourite with the thief-taker's body-guard at large. He was not one of their kind. They were jealous of the confidence which Wild reposed in him, and they disliked him accordingly.

The matter, however, was talked over in the hall while Jonathan was absent on his excursion, and, in the end, Tonks, who was really in the main not a bad-hearted fellow, volunteered to go and fetch Mr. Snoxall, and so Steggs had his wound dressed.

The apothecary, however, would not hold out the slightest hopes of his recovery. He said he might do so, but the chances were all the other way. What the effect of all this would be upon Steggs should he eventually recover is hard to say. He was of a vindictive, revengeful spirit, and would probably enough inflict all the injury he could upon the person who had dealt him such a terrible blow.

This is a matter, however, which must be left to time for unfolding.

And so, divided from each other by a space of a few yards only, were Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, and Steggs.

At that very time, too, Edgworth Bess, in the cushioned recesses of the old pew in St. Paul's Cathedral, was enjoying a comfortable repose which would go far to recuperate her wasted energies.

Jack, too, slept soundly and calmly, and Blueskin kept watch over both the slumberers, his brain being all the while busily engaged in devising some means which would promise an eventual escape.

And so the chief actors in this strange story were at this time all similarly occupied—that is to say, were asleep.

All but one.

That one was an unfortunate being who had become so changed that not even his most intimate friend would know him.

The change, too, had taken place in a very short space of time.

But the dungeons beneath Jonathan Wild's house were of such a frightful description that a very short period of incarceration in one of them would suffice to effect a very great change indeed.

We are now alluding to Lord Donnull, whom Jonathan Wild had entrapped with so much ingenuity into one of his cells.

The unfortunate nobleman now saw, when it was too late, that he had been made a dupe of by the thief-taker, and that he had been made use of like a puppet.

The conviction was gall and wormwood to him, and he spent his time in uttering vain curses upon his own inebriety.

Then there would come times when he would feel a sudden accession of vigour, caused when he had made up his mind to escape and restore his poor persecuted niece to her possessions.

This he would have done long since if Wild had permitted him, but such a proceeding as that by no means accorded with his own plans.

And now the end of it all was, his incarceration in that loathsome and pestiferous dungeon, which was so strongly built that it had hitherto successfully defied all the attempts he had made to escape from it.

He did not sleep.

In that place it was almost impossible, and so on that night, or, rather, early morning, Lord Donnull was watchful and awake.

Jonathan Wild slept very heavily.

It was a deep, dreamless slumber at first.

He was too thoroughly prostrated to dream, but after awhile, when his fatigue abated, then his brain began to exercise itself.

Visions of the most horrible description conceivable flitted like a dismal phantasmagoria before his distempered brain.

We will not pause to describe them—they would only take up unnecessary space, and crowd the reader's mind with unmitigated horrors. We will pass over them in silence.

More than once Jonathan groaned, as something of a

more than usually awful nature appeared to him, but still he did not wake.

Nor did he until the fierce rays of the morning sun poured full upon his countenance.

Then he opened his eyes, but the sudden blaze of light almost blinded him, so he closed them again.

He turned over on to his other side, so that the burning beams no longer played upon him.

He was awake, but still he gave no signs of being so.

He was thinking.

He had fallen into a deep reverie.

Circumstances had now assumed so complicated a character that a little clear-headed thought was indispensable.

And so the thief-taker took the present opportunity as being one well suited to the purpose.

His reflections ran somewhat in this strain.

"What am I to think of this? In what way will it end? How is it that I, who have ever prided myself in succeeding in everything I undertook, should be so baffled? How is it that those designs, which would be successful on any one else, are useless against Jack Sheppard? Is there such a thing as an evil spirit in human form, who dogs his unhappy victim in every enterprise he takes in hand, and frustrates it? I have heard some persons before now broach such a theory. If it is correct, then assuredly does my evil spirit exhibit itself in the person of Jack Sheppard. But pho—pho! Speculation of that kind is foolish!

"I have sworn to hang him at Tyburn, and I will keep my oath, though everything in heaven and hell should swear against—even if I knew that I myself should perish the moment afterwards. But that shall not be. Let me think calmly, if I can, of what has taken place. I want some brandy. That would assist me vastly."

But just then there was no brandy at hand, and the thief-taker did not feel inclined to take the trouble to get or call for any. The thoughts we have set down coursed each other, one after another, through his brain, as thoughts sometimes will when one lies in a state half between sleeping and waking.

At such a time the body is powerless to obey the will, or rather the will is not strong enough to exert its due influence upon the body.

Jonathan continued his reflections.

"Let me think. Now, when they made their escape over the wall into Newgate-market, they must have gone down Warwick-lane towards Ludgate-hill. I have prof positive that they did so. They have disappeared. Where, I should wonder, have they found a hiding-place?"

This was a question that he perplexed his brain in vain to find an answer to, so at length he was obliged to give it up in despair.

"Never mind where they have concealed themselves," he added at last, "I shall be sure to find out before long. I will consider that point as being quite settled. Now the next thing is, how shall I proceed when I get them all three once more in my power?"

"Blueskin and Jack Sheppard I have already agreed as to the disposal of. The latter is now under sentence of death, so I shall have no further trouble with him, without it would be to swear to his identity. Then, as for Blueskin, it would be the easiest matter in the world to procure a conviction on some capital crime, and he shall swing at Tyburn, too. How I wish that time had come, and that the bodies were swinging to and fro in the morning air. Then, indeed, would my troubles be over, and I should be able to carry out my plans successfully."

"The revenues and the broad acres which comprise the Donnull estate I have resolved shall be mine, and when I resolve upon a thing it is as good as accomplished. I have made up my mind as to the means. I will force this Edgworth Bess, as they call her (for she is, without the shadow of a doubt, the rightful heiress) into a marriage with me; and surely that would be a means at once simple, easy, and agreeable. Unfortunately, the girl is not of age, but she soon will be. I must get her and keep her securely until that day arrives, and then I shall be able to use such arguments that she will find it impossible to refuse me. Yea, such shall be my course. It is clear and straightforward, and the obstacles that stand in my path are comparatively few in number."

"Then there is Lord Donnull, as he calls himself.

Well, for the present he is safe, and I need not trouble myself any further just now concerning him. I can make up my mind as to his ultimate disposal at any time. He is a weak fool, or he might have enjoyed the property for some time yet; but he was free to choose, and he has made his choice, so it is but fair that he should abide by it. Then I shall retire from this harassing life I have been leading. It is wearing me out. I can feel it, but then I shall have rest—plenty of rest; and as the husband of Lady Donnull I should be forgotten and unrecognised as the notorious thief-taker. I shall not go to her with an empty pocket. I have riches now sufficient to satisfy even an avaricious man, and with such wealth at my disposal I shall, after the lapse of a few years, be able to purchase a transfer of the title to myself, and then Jonathan Wild will be henceforward known as Lord Donnull!"

CHAPTER CCXXXV.

THE THREE FUGITIVES FIND ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL NOT SUCH A COMFORTABLE PLACE OF REFUGE AFTER ALL.

It would have been no bad thing if some one had been at hand to warn Jonathan Wild of the folly of counting his chickens before they were hatched.

The occupation of castle building in the air is, however, found to be a pleasant occupation by almost all parties, and the thief-taker was no exception. It was so delightful to be there in that state of semi-somnolency and picture what he should do.

He, however, felicitated himself rather too early, and looked upon the thing as already done when it actually was not begun.

The plan he had laid down was most certainly a very good one—perhaps the best that could have been devised to answer the end intended.

But then, like all other schemes, it depended for realization upon a great many contingences, and should any of these turn out different to what he expected, the whole complexion of affairs would be altered.

There was a great deal to be done yet.

Jack Sheppard and Blueskin were at large, and they had Edgworth Bess under their protection.

Of that, however, as his reflections will serve to show, the thief-taker did not seem to think much.

True, they had eluded him, and their present whereabouts was quite unknown to him; but he relied upon hearing something ere long which would enable him to effect their capture; and he made up his mind that if Jack Sheppard once more fell into his hands, he would take such precautions as to make it a matter of total impossibility for him to escape.

He cursed himself for his remissness on former occasions, and yet, when he thought upon the subject, he could not help feeling a certain amount of admiration for the daring youth who had twice done what no other man had ever dreamed of accomplishing.

But Jonathan soon banished that feeling.

He had reasoned himself into one course of action, and he determined to follow it. There was something antagonistic between Jack Sheppard and himself, and he felt sure that none of his schemes would be brought to a successful end if he was alive, for hitherto had he not sprang up and thwarted every one?

Jonathan's thoughts turned most upon the present situation of those three persons whose capture he was so anxious to effect.

"They are hiding," he said. "I am sure of it. They must be hiding. But where? Not far off, I'll be bound; perhaps under my nose. Well, we shall see. I will have spies posted in every direction, whose special business it shall be to look for them. Then, when they make their appearance—as they must do sooner or later—then I shall know my course. I will have a horse procured and a band of mounted men in readiness. Then I will put myself upon their track, and if I lose sight of them this time, I will never try to capture them again. But I shall follow them—I shall hunt them to earth—then I shall triumph, and all that I have aimed at shall be mine.

"Oh! what a difference it would have made to me if I could have had Jack Sheppard on my side! If he had ever been at hand—not like he is now, to thwart my plans, but to aid me in them! But I must not think of that. I have sworn he shall die at Tyburn, and I will keep my

oath. I have an old score to settle with him: his father once struck me, then crossed me in an affair which I had near at heart. I took an oath that I would be revenged upon him, and I was, for less than a month afterwards he swung at Tyburn! And there this accursed brat of his shall follow him, or, confound him! I shall know no peace!"

Having reached this point in his reflections, Jonathan rose, with the intention of putting some of his resolve into execution.

He spent but a very few moments over his toilette, and then went downstairs.

He then found that midday had passed.

The pangs of hunger began to make themselves apparent now that he was so thoroughly rested, but before he attempted to satisfy them, he called Quilt on one side, and gave him various instructions relative to posting the spies.

The order was obeyed immediately, and various members of Wild's gang were communicated with, who placed themselves in various positions about the metropolis to keep good watch upon every one they saw, and in the event of either of the three fugitives coming under their notice, they were by no means to lose sight of them, but communicate without delay with the great thief-taker himself.

This having been done, Jonathan Wild, feeling much stronger and better than he had done for days past, went over to the eating-house in Giltspur-street, where he dispatched a hearty meal.

Under such circumstances as these we feel that we can leave him for a time while we repair to St. Paul's Cathedral, beneath which roof are those in whom we feel a much greater interest than we can in the villainous thief-taker.

The night passed away without their meeting with an interruption of any kind.

Edgworth Bess slept calmly and quietly upon the soft cushions of the pew.

At length, when morning came and a faint light struggled in at the windows of the cathedral, showing that, ere long, the interior of the place would be illuminated by the sun, Blueskin, who was watching, touched Jack Sheppard, who was asleep, on the arm and woke him.

For a moment Jack could not think in what strange place he was, but he saw his companion by his side, and then recollected all.

"Jack, I have been thinking for this last half-hour or so."

"Of what?"

"Many things, but chiefly what we should do with ourselves when daylight came."

"Why?"

"We cannot remain where we now are. You must be aware that during the day not a portion of the cathedral remains unvisited by some one or other."

"I suppose not."

"Now this will only be a good hiding-place for us so long as we are not suspected to be in it, but the moment that is known, it will be the most dangerous place in the world."

"Very true; I had not thought of that."

"Bess still slumbers. Now you can tell, by the faint light which finds its way in here that morning is coming on apace, and therefore it behoves us to make up our minds quickly as to where we shall secrete ourselves during the remainder of the day. When the officials arrive it will be too late."

"So it will. And have you been thinking about all this?"

"Yes."

"Then I should not be afraid to say that you have thought of some place where we can safely hide ourselves."

"I can't say but what I have, Jack; still I should like you to reflect as well as myself. I can only think of one place, and that has some disagreeables connected with it, so I would fain find another."

"Well, let me think. What place is the least visited? Why, I know!"

"What?"

"I have heard many a time that underneath St. Paul's Cathedral there are numberless vaulted passages. They are like the streets in a town. That will be the place for

us. Why, if it is like the description I have heard of it, we could hide there till doomsday."

"That is the very place I had myself thought of."

"Is it? Then why did you hesitate about it?"

"Why, a churchyard vault is not a very pleasant place to be in, that is all."

"But that is nothing."

"Well, perhaps not to you and me, but you must think who we have with us."

"Edgworth Bess?"

"Yes. She may be alarmed and terrified at the idea of being in such a place."

"I think not. At any rate, we can but ask her."

"Very true; but, before we do so, I should like to try and find some other place that offered equal chances of security."

"You had better abandon that idea at once, my friend, because I am quite sure you would not succeed. We ought not to lose any time, either. Look how fast it is getting light."

"It is."

"And you must recollect that we have got the entrance to the vaults to find, and that may take some time."

"Yes. Two heads are always better than one. I never gave that a moment's thought."

"We may have some difficulty, you know, in getting into the vaults, for they take care to make everything wonderfully secure."

"They do."

"Let us start at once, then."

"And Edgworth Bess?"

"What?"

"Shall we wake her?"

"No, leave her where she is."

"Then we must not go out of earshot."

"Oh! no; for if she happened to wake up and find we were not near her, she would be terribly alarmed; besides which, I should not like to go far away, for fear that something should happen to her."

"Ah! Jack, it is a thousand pities that you could not have been content with being a friend to her, without being a lover into the bargain. I can see how the land lies. She likes you as well as you do her. A blind man could see that. Well, Jack, I must say again that it is a thousand pities, and I am heartily sorry for you both. Nothing but ill can come of it—I am sure of that; and, mark me, if my words don't come true."

"Don't prophecy any more evil for us," said Jack, forcing a light laugh, though in secret he was much moved by the forebodings to which Blueskin had just given utterance. "I am sure we have got trouble enough!"

"We have, indeed. I only wish I could see the end of it. How it is all to end is more than either you or I can see at present."

"We must not get upon that subject now. We agreed not to talk over our plans until Edgworth Bess was with us, and could hear and approve of them. You forget what we have to do."

"No, I do not."

"Then come, let us at once set about finding some means of entering the vaults."

Blueskin rose, and he and Jack left the pew in which they had passed the night, but, before they went away, they were careful to restore it to its original condition, and close the door.

Then on tiptoe they crossed the aisle and peeped into the pew in which Edgworth Bess was sleeping.

She was all safe and well, so they set about their exploring expedition without further delay.

The interior of the cathedral was now tolerably well illuminated, so that they were able to make their way about it without much trouble.

They ran no risk of coming in contact with any of the numerous objects in the interior.

To any one coming into St. Paul's, however, from the open daylight, the cathedral would have appeared to be in total darkness.

But to our friends, who had been there so many hours, and whose eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, the faint twilight which was dispersed about the sacred edifice seemed to them like broad day.

Indeed, philosophers assert that on this earth no such thing as total and utter darkness ever prevails, and instances are on record where prisoners have been con-

fined in dungeons, and who have been unable to distinguish anything, have by degrees, as their eyes have become accustomed to the obscurity, been able to discern the walls, and even the rats and mice with which the dungeon was infested.

So Blueskin walked about in ease and safety, and was able to see everything.

But for a long time their search for some means of reaching the vaults beneath the church was an unsuccessful one; until at length Jack pointed out to his companion a small door set in a recess, and which had escaped Blueskin's eye.

Jack's younger and keener vision, however, detected it.

"This promises to be the very thing we want," he said; "but how are we to get the door open?"

"It may be unfastened."

"No, it is fast; and the only securement I can find is a lock."

"Let me look at it."

"Here you are, then."

Jack stepped out of the little recess in which the door was situated, and allowed Blueskin to enter it.

It was a low, arched door, having all the appearance of leading to the vaults.

It was strong, and crossed in many directions with bands of iron.

Blueskin felt for the keyhole.

It was of enormous size, for in those days the idea was in full prevalence that for a lock to be strong and secure it must of necessity be large.

Indeed, its strength and security were always considered in proportion to its weight and size.

The key of this one, for instance, was so large that Blueskin was able to introduce his finger into it without any trouble.

"I don't know what to do with this, Jack," he said.

"Why not?"

"The keyhole is so large."

"But you have skeleton keys."

"Yes; but none anything like large enough for this lock. If I had a good-sized nail, now, I might do something."

"That would be a funny thing to pick a lock with."

"Not at all. A strong nail hooked at one end is the best thing in the world. I will show you the knack."

"What with?"

"Well, not a nail, but the instrument that I lifted the trap-door with that leads into Wild's warehouse."

"I know."

"I had forgotten all about it, but it will be just the thing. Here you are."

Blueskin put the crooked instrument into the keyhole. A clicking noise followed, and then there was a snap, which showed that the bolt of the lock had been shot back into its setting.

The door creaked open.

What was beyond they could not tell, though Jack peeped over Blueskin's shoulder and strained his eyes to the utmost.

A damp earthy smell, however, saluted their nostrils, which made them think that a charnel-house was not far distant.

"We must light the taper," said Blueskin, "before we can see what this place is like. It may not lead to the vaults after all."

"I hope so, after all the trouble we have taken."

"So do I, but we shall know in a moment."

Blueskin again produced his box of phosphorus and thieves' matches, as they were called, and ignited the little piece of wax taper.

The flame burst up slowly and steadily.

A draught of cold air, which came from the open door, threatened every moment its extinguishment, but Blueskin shaded the flame with his hand and cautiously stepped forward.

CHAPTER CCXXXVI.

EDGWORTH BESS IS UNFORTUNATE ENOUGH TO ENCOUNTER JONATHAN WILD IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

By standing fairly on the threshold of the door, the current of air was in a great measure done away with, and then Blueskin saw that he stood at the top of a flight of stone

steps, which seemed to lead down to the very foundations of the cathedral.

Very slimy and damp, and overgrown with a kind of green parasitic moss were those steps, and, indeed, they presented every appearance of not having been made use of for many years.

"This is all in our favour," said Blueskin. "I do not suppose, if we had searched the whole place through, we should have found anything that suited us so well."

"I think the best thing we can do is to go and wake Bess and take up our quarters here at once, for, if we were to be seen, we should be quite done for."

"Evidently."

"Then let us go and wake her," said Jack, "you will remain here. I will bring her, and then we shall not have the trouble of finding this particular place again."

This was a by no means unnecessary precaution, for in that vast place, if they had once lost the door, they would have had a great deal of trouble in finding it again.

Blueskin consented to this arrangement, and Jack hastened to the pew where he had left Edgworth Bess asleep.

She was asleep still, and, with a beating heart, he asked himself whether she was dead, for she had slept uninterruptedly.

He listened, and then his fears were dispelled, for in the silence of the sacred edifice he could hear her breathing.

Reassured, he called to her in a low voice and awakened her.

At first she was startled, but the sound of his voice was familiar to her ears, and the moment she heard it, she felt safe to a certain extent.

"You must leave this place," said Jack; "it will be unsafe to stay here any longer, because of the many persons who come to visit the cathedral. Blueskin is at a little distance off. We shall have to seek a fresh shelter during the day."

"Anywhere with you, Jack, no matter where it is. I will obey you in all things. Where is Wild?"

"I have heard nothing of him, and, therefore, I begin to hope that for the present we are safe from his persecutions."

"Oh! I trust so."

"Come with me as quickly as you can, for Blueskin is awaiting us, and every moment that we stay will be dangerous to us."

"I am ready, Jack."

Edgworth Bess opened the pew door and stepped out into the aisle.

As soon as she had done so, Jack entered and put the cushions straight, leaving them just as they were at first.

He also closed the pew door.

Then, taking the hand of Edgworth Bess in his own, he led her to the spot where Blueskin was waiting for them.

As yet there were no signs of any one entering the cathedral, but, as it was fully daylight, there was no knowing how soon visitors might be expected.

On reaching the little door in the recess, Blueskin went first down about half-a-dozen of the steps, and then stood in readiness to assist Bess to descend, who came next.

Jack brought up the rear.

As he passed through the portal, Blueskin said to him—

"Close the door after you. If you look you will find a couple of bolts on the inner side. You had better draw them, and then you will secure us from intrusion."

This was good policy, for not only would it have the effect Blueskin had mentioned, but it would also serve to prevent the fact of the door having been unlocked being noticed.

This done, they commenced the descent of the slippery stone steps.

Blueskin went first, cautiously holding the light, and showing the way to his two companions.

It was positively necessary for them to support themselves by the walls, or they would never have been able to maintain their footing.

The flight of steps was of great length, but at last the bottom was reached, and then our three friends found themselves standing in a kind of vaulted passage, which stretched out to the right and the left from the bottom of the steps.

On gaining this place, all three stopped to look about them, and then, by Blueskin's advice, they turned to the right.

The atmosphere in that gloomy place was very attenuated, and it was with considerable difficulty that they breathed, while every moment the little wax taper seemed on the point of expiring.

But it struggled manfully against the foul air that was in the place.

Blueskin kept on, in the hope that they would, ere long, come to a more comfortable place, where they could wait until the day had passed away, but every step he took the passage seemed to get worse, so at last he was obliged to come to a halt altogether.

It was then agreed that they should turn back and retrace their steps until they came to the flight of stone steps which they had descended, and then keep on past them, it the hope that it would lead them to a more salubrious region.

And certainly they found, as they proceeded, that the air got better and better, though, of course, it was impure in the extreme.

The passage terminated at the bottom of another flight of steps, and, from their breadth, and the scrupulous manner in which they were brushed, our friends came to the conclusion that they had reached the regular entrance to the vaults.

After a little deliberation, they agreed to ascend these as far as the door, which was doubtless at the top, and then sit down upon them and wait.

This was poor accommodation, but still it was the best that offered itself.

At the top of the stairs, as they had expected, they found a door.

It was massive in its character, and the whole of the fastenings were upon the outside.

But in the upper part of it was a large iron grating.

Jack looked through this and found that it commanded a view of a large portion of the cathedral.

A number of beams of light found their way through this grating, making the wax taper quite unnecessary, so it was extinguished.

Our friends then found themselves in a dim kind of twilight, but still it was amply sufficient for them.

Here, then, they agreed to remain during the whole of the day, provided they were not interrupted, and to talk over their plans for future operations.

To guard against any sudden surprise, and from eavesdroppers, Blueskin and Jack agreed to take it in turns to stand at the grating and look into the church, so as to give notice of any one's approach.

Then they commenced laying down their plans and speculating upon the movements of their enemies; but it is unnecessary to set this down in full, as their plans will best develop themselves in action.

More than once during their conversation they had to pause, for fear they should be overheard by the visitors, some of whom came very close to the door.

But as one was always on the watch, no alarm was given.

And so the day passed.

There was one thing, however, which, though present in the minds of all, neither liked to touch upon.

And that one thing was, what were they to do for food?

The question was a serious and important one.

Many hours had elapsed since anything in the shape of food had passed the lips of either of them, but now all felt in full acuteness the pangs of hunger, and they had done so for a long time.

And yet, with praiseworthy stoicism, not one breathed to the other a word of complaint.

Jack and Blueskin, however, felt far more keenly for their fair companion than they did for themselves.

They knew how she must be suffering, and yet she had not once murmured.

And so the hours dragged slowly by.

Gradually conversation ceased.

They found that the action of their lungs produced by talking increased their pangs, and so they all became gradually silent.

There were many no doubt who, happy in the possession of all they desired, felt that day to glide swiftly away and for night to come upon them almost before they were aware of it; but it might safely be said that there were

no creatures on this earth to whom it passed more slowly and more wearisomely than it did to the three fugitives in the vaults beneath St. Paul's Cathedral.

At length Edgworth Bess, who had stood out as long as she was able, gave way.

She did not expect any relief, but she could not maintain the concealment of her sufferings any longer.

She appealed to Jack.

Blueskin was watching at the grating.

"Jack," she said. "J—J—"

"What?"

"I am so very, very hungry, Jack. Oh! what shall I do? I never suffered so before."

She burst into tears as she spoke.

"I know you are hungry," said Jack, in a voice of deep emotion, "and I can tell by my own sufferings what your's must be like. I can do nothing to help you, I am afraid, until it grows darker, and then, perhaps, I may manage."

"But at what risk?"

"Never mind the risk, darling. You must not be allowed to perish of starvation."

"Nor must you lose your life to procure me food. Oh! Jack, what shall we do?"

"I will ask Blueskin."

"I have heard all that has passed," he said, as soon as he heard his name mentioned, "and I have thought of a plan."

"What is it?"

"To get you food."

"I know; but what is the plan?"

"I will go back to the door through which we came, and open it."

"And emerge into the body of the cathedral?"

"Yes. I have noticed that it is full of visitors, and I shall not be noticed among the number, I think. I will go out and buy as much provisions as I can stow about me unperceived, and then return, if you will be at the door waiting to receive me."

"No—no," said Jack; "the risk is too great."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. Let me go instead."

"Nonsense! the risk is twice as much for you as it is for me. Rely upon it, I will return in safety."

"There is only one thing which would induce me to accede to such a proposition," replied Jack, "and that is for the sake of Edgworth Bess."

"It is for her sake I make it," said Blueskin.

"Then you shall not go," exclaimed Edgworth Bess.

"Indeed, you shall not."

"But I shall."

"No; and I will give you a good reason why you shall not."

"Why?"

"Both you and Jack are well known to many persons, and would be in imminent danger of recognition."

"We don't dispute that; but it can't be helped."

"It can."

"How so?"

"Most easily."

"Tell us."

"I will go."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Never."

"Why not?"

"It is impossible."

"I cannot see that. I am known to Jonathan Wild only, and, therefore, do not run the risk that you do; besides, I could purchase the things that we require without exciting suspicion, which you certainly would."

"But neither Jack nor myself would ever consent to allowing you to run into so much danger."

"I consider I should be in the least danger of all. Grant me the favour. Let me go. I will take every care, but we cannot die of starvation."

"We cannot."

"Consent—it will be best for all of us."

Jack and Blueskin held a whispered consultation with each other, the end of which was that they consented to allow Edgworth Bess to emerge into the cathedral to purchase food.

They retraced their steps to the bottom of the flight of stone steps which in the first instance they all three had descended.

On reaching the top they noiselessly withdrew the bolts, and then listened.

But all was still.

Cautiously, then, they opened the door to the extent of about a couple of inches, and Jack peeped out.

No one was in sight.

He beckoned Edgworth Bess towards him, and opened the door wide enough for her to pass out of it.

She glided through the portal like a shadow, and Jack closed the door behind her.

Oh! how anxious and alarmed he felt when he found that she had really gone.

He could hardly restrain himself from going after her, but, fortunately for both, he was stronger than the impulse.

He did not shut the door quite close, but left it ajar, so he crouched down on the top of the steps, and peeped through the crevice.

Minute after minute elapsed, and every one that passed away increased his anxiety to a tenfold degree, and over and over again he repented that he had suffered her to depart.

But these regrets were useless, and came too late.

The only thing he could do now was to wait in patience in expectation of her return.

But she came not.

He did not, however, give her time sufficient.

But to him she seemed to have been gone an age.

His suspense became dreadful.

It was shared to the full by his faithful comrade, Blueskin.

At last, however, when they had both worked themselves up to an unbearable pitch of excitement, Jack's quick ear caught the sound of a light footstep.

The next moment he saw Edgworth Bess approaching.

He rose from his crouching posture, and pulled the door open.

The poor girl rushed in, breathless and agitated.

"What is the matter?" asked Jack. "What has alarmed you?"

"Quick—quick! Close the door—bolt it—bolt it! Ah! that is well. Now we are safe!"

"For heaven's sake tell me what is the matter?"

"Here is food. I have been lucky enough to procure that—but—but—"

"What, oh! what?"

"Just as I was crossing to the churchyard, which I did hastily, I ran against some one who was going in the opposite direction. I heard an awful curse. I looked up, and saw that I had run against Jonathan Wild!"

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

WITH A GREAT DEAL OF LABOUR AND DIFFICULTY, THE THREE FUGITIVES SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE VAULTS OF ST. PAUL'S.

"JONATHAN WILD!" exclaimed Jack Sheppard and Blueskin in a breath, for they could scarcely believe their ears. "Jonathan Wild?"

"Yes, even him."

"Did he know you?"

"I fancy so, but I did not wait to see. I ran into the cathedral as fast as I could."

"Did he pursue you?"

"That is more than I can tell for certain."

"What an unlucky chance. This will serve us for a retreat no longer."

"You have had a very narrow escape," said Jack.

"I have, indeed. I have been so alarmed. But eat. Look, here is food; and then, when you have satisfied your hunger, it will be time for you to think of escaping from Wild."

"That is good advice," responded Blueskin. "We can do nothing in our present exhausted state."

The small quantity of eatables Edgworth Bess was able to obtain was shared out.

The keenness of their hunger gave them a relish, and it had disappeared in an incredible short space of time.

"I think," said Jack, "that the best thing we can do is to retrace our steps to the principal entrance to the vaults, and from which place we can obtain a view of the body of the cathedral."

"To be sure," coincided Blueskin. "We should then be able to see whether a disturbance of any kind was



[THE THREE FUGITIVES MAKE ANOTHER EFFORT TO ESCAPE.]

taking place in the body of the cathedral, and take our measures accordingly."

"Just so."

"Come on, then."

Once more, with Blueskin leading the way, they directed their course to the flight of broad stone steps leading up to the door which formed the principal entrance to the vaults.

They glanced eagerly through the grating.

Their worst suspicions were realized.

A scene of the greatest confusion was taking place in the body of the cathedral, and conspicuously above all was the form of Jonathan Wild.

He had a number of men with him.

The thief-taker was gesticulating furiously, and it was evident he was on their track, and about to thoroughly search the huge edifice.

This was enough.

More our friends did not want to see.

All they had to do now was to make the best of their time, and find some means of exit from the vaults.

But where was that exit to be found?

Into what place could they hope to emerge?

That time must determine.

The passage certainly went no further than the steps upon which they stood.

They had no choice of routes.

They must keep straight on in the direction they had at first taken, namely, towards that spot from which they had had to return in consequence of the foulness of the atmosphere.

With many misgivings the lamp was again lighted, and they took their way along the gloomy and pestiferous passage.

Suddenly, however, there came to their ears, though in a subdued and muffled fashion, as though at a great distance, the sound of some heavy blows struck against a hollow substance.

This added a fresh impulse to their speed.

But the taper gave them great anxiety, for it seemed next to an impossibility to keep it alight, owing to the speed they were obliged to make.

Presently, however, they found their passage barred by a door.

Jack hastened forward to examine it.

He could see no fastenings, so he tried to push it open.

It would not move.

But, upon exerting a greater pressure, it gave way, having got stuck in its framework by the damp.

The moment this door was opened, they were rewarded with a gush of fresh air which came through it.

The taper now revived, and gave out quite a brilliant light.

They pushed eagerly forward through this door.

Jack, however, turned back to see if he could find any fastenings to it on the other side, but there were none.

And now the appearance of the passage totally changed its character.

Hitherto it had been arched and bricked, but now it was only cut out of the solid earth, and both walls and roof were composed of black-looking soil.

The floor beneath their feet was moist and sticky.

But paying no heed to this trifling inconvenience, they pushed along with all the speed they possibly could, in the hope of finding a way out.

Whereabouts they were was more than they could tell. Whether the cathedral was above them, or whether they had got altogether beyond its precincts, was more than they knew, though such knowledge, if they had only possessed it, would have proved of infinite value to them in their present position.

On, on they went, the passage seeming endless; but they noticed as they advanced that it got more and more confined in its dimensions.

Their pursuers, if they had been clever enough to get precisely on their track (which was scarcely likely), were nowhere within hearing, so there was some hope to be gleaned from that circumstance.

But at last this passage, which seemed interminable, had an end, and our friends reached it.

When they did so, they looked about them with some dismay.

Instead of finding the egress they had expected, the passage abruptly terminated with a mass of earth before them, as though it had been begun and never completed.

"What is above us, Blue?" asked Jack, after they had fully taken in their new position.

"I wish I knew!"

"We must take our chance and find out, for it is quite certain that the only thing we can do is to bore our way out. We cannot return, and we have only soft earth to deal with."

"But we have no tools."

"Then we must make shift without them in the best way we are able."

"We are in a very awkward position, Jack."

"Do not despair, Blue."

"It is enough to make one, when we reflect a little upon our position. I am afraid you do not fully realize it."

"I do."

"We are here, just like rats in a trap, waiting to be caught. This passage we have been unfortunate enough to get into is one of those which were intended to be formed into vaults, but which have never been completed."

"That's about it."

"The workmen have gone so far and then left it. Now, if we remain here, we are sure to be found sooner or later by Jonathan Wild, if we do not perish of starvation in the meantime. If we attempt to leave this place, we must retrace our steps, and the immediate consequence of that will be, we shall fall into our enemies' hands, for, though we are armed and resisted to the last, yet it is absurd for us to hope to obtain the victory over such numbers."

Upon hearing this dismal account of their position, poor Edgworth Bess's heart sunk within her, and, clasping her hands together, she burst into tears.

"Oh! this is all my fault," she sobbed. "It is I alone who have brought you into this great peril. It was my utter carelessness. I ought to have looked where I was going, and not have run blindly into the arms of Jonathan Wild, and set him upon our track in the way I have done."

"Do not reproach yourself—pray do not," said Jack,

soothingly. "No blame attaches itself to you. You run a fearful risk of being immediately captured by that bold bad man, who is the evil star of your existence."

"But then, if he had taken me in the churchyard, you would have escaped. Now we shall all fall into his hands."

"No—no. I hope not."

"Do you think there is room for hope?"

"Indeed I do. Blueskin, here, takes rather a gloomy view of our situation, but, then, he is doubtless suffering much anguish from his wound, and that will make a difference to any man. Believe me, I am very far indeed from the thought of relinquishing all hope. I think it quite possible we may once more escape from the clutches of our arch enemy, Jonathan Wild."

These words, which were spoken in a tone of confidence, had a cheering influence upon Edgworth Bess, and she evidently thought their position less desperate than at first.

Where they stood they could hear no sounds indicative of the approach of their foes.

In that vast edifice it would be a matter of considerable difficulty for Jonathan Wild, clever as he was in such matters, to get exactly upon their track.

So many turnings would present themselves to his notice, each offering an equal chance of success, that it would be a matter of impossibility almost for him to hit upon the proper one, without some person's knowledge on the subject which would serve him as a guide.

Having spoken to Edgworth Bess the words of consolation we have recorded, Jack Sheppard looked all around him to find some chance of making their escape.

At length he addressed his companion.

"Blue," he said, "I do not see that we stand the ghost of a chance of making our escape, except we adopt the means which I first proposed to you."

"You mean boring a passage out?"

"Yes."

"That will be a work of immense labour."

"Perhaps not. It may be that we are not far from the surface, and that a few moments' vigorous work may open to us a way to freedom."

"It is just possible that such may be the case, but in my judgment not at all probable."

"But we can try, and anyhow it is worth our while."

"The worst of it is we have no tools."

"That is awkward, I admit; but then we have our swords, and with them I should think we shall not have much trouble in making our way through this soft earth. Let us try, at all events."

There was certainly no harm in doing this, so Blueskin followed the example of Jack Sheppard, and drew his sword.

The little wax taper was given to Edgworth Bess, and she held it as high up in the air as she could.

Going, then, to the extremity of the passage, Jack and Blueskin looked closely at the wall of earth that was before them.

There was, however, very little to see.

Certainly nothing to choose for a place at which to commence their operations.

But Jack with his sword gave a vigorous thrust at that part of it where it was joined to the roof, or rather where the wall ended and the ceiling began.

The earth was very soft, for the sword-blade buried itself immediately.

"Come on, Blue; lend us your aid. Bless you! we shall have no trouble in carving our way out."

As he spoke, Jack pulled his sword out again and began picking away the earth.

It fell down on to the floor of the passage in large lumps.

This was encouraging, and Blueskin gave his help as well.

Edgworth Bess made herself useful by holding the light, and in that way aiding them in their operations.

They worked with right good will, and they soon made quite a large breach.

Every moment, too, their task grew lighter, for the earth fell in large portions and with greater ease.

Blueskin did not like to confess it, but he was terribly fatigued.

There was, in the first place, his wound, which had never been properly attended to.

From it a large quantity of blood had effused, and want of rest and food made him more sensible of its loss than he would have been.

This accounted for the desponding manner in which he spoke when, contrary to the expectations in which he had indulged, he found that there was no outlet to the passage.

Jack's example, however, had a beneficial effect upon him, and he, to a certain extent, forgot his debilitation as he saw the rapid progress they were making in their work.

There did indeed now seem at least a reasonable prospect of their being successful in making their escape.

Jack worked with uncommon vigour, but then he had every incentive to make the utmost exertion he was able.

Presently, however, Jack felt his sword strike against some hard substance.

But, thinking it was merely a stone which he had encountered, he plunged his sword into the earth a few feet further off.

The same result followed.

The point of his weapon struck with the same sharp, metallic sound, against something which it was unable to penetrate.

But, not daunted by this, he continued his work, satisfied that there was some obstacle in the way, but determined that it should be overcome.

Accordingly, he removed the earth which covered it, and then saw that a brick wall was disclosed.

But it was very dark in colour, and seemed as though it was rapidly crumbling away.

This effect was doubtless produced by the contact of the damp earth having a corroding influence.

"What are we to do now?" asked Blueskin.

"We must think a moment. Can you hear any sounds of pursuit?"

"No, all seems still."

"Good, then we have a little while for consideration, and I trust a chance of making our way out."

"What do you want to consider?"

"Why, if I possibly could, I should like to ascertain whereabouts we are. I mean to try and find out what is overhead."

"That I am afraid will be very difficult, if not impossible."

"No, I do not think so."

"Why not?"

"I will tell you. I have been thinking about it for some time. You know where they are doing the repairs?"

"Yes."

"That is at the end of the cathedral nearest Watling-street."

"Or Cheapside?"

"Just so. It is all the same thing. Now think. Do you recollect which way we took when we entered?"

"Yes."

"And, then, in which direction the door lay through which we entered the vaults?"

"Yes; that was the Watling-street end of the cathedral."

"Of course it was."

"Then the stairs curved round as we descended, and when we got to the bottom we found there was a passage going right and left."

"That is quite correct."

"Please attend, then. The passage to the left, as you know very well, took us under a part of the cathedral itself."

"Yes."

"Well, then we turned to the right. Now, it appears to me that, as we have come in a straight line from the foot of the steps, and for a very considerable distance, we must have passed under the churchyard—under the road that goes round the east end of it, and that we are now somewhere near Watling-street."

"Stop a minute," said Blueskin; "let me consider."

CHAPTER CCXXXVIII.

OUR THREE FRIENDS SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THEIR WAY OUT OF THE VAULTS OF ST. PAUL'S, BUT NOT OUT OF DANGER.

As he spoke, Blueskin placed his hands over his eyes, so as to shut out the view of the objects by which he was

surrounded, and endeavoured to ascertain whether Jack was correct with respect to their situation.

When his eyes were thus closed, Blueskin could see before him the cathedral with reference to the position it occupied, and, as he did so, he turned round once or twice, and at length, stopping with his face in one direction, he said—

"If I am right, I ought now to be directly facing Watling-street, for I have considered our whereabouts very attentively."

So saying, Blueskin removed his hands from before his face, and, looking straight before him, he found he was exactly opposite the breach which had been made in the wall of the passage.

This remarkable coincidence with Jack's idea filled them with tolerable security.

It was scarcely possible for them both to make such a mistake.

"I am right," said Jack. "Now we are not far from freedom, I hope."

"What shall you do next?"

"Why, break through that wall. It looks quite rotten, and I daresay it will be done easily enough."

"But what shall you do afterwards? How do you know where it will take you?"

"Why, I take it, we cannot very well tell that until we look. Come Blueskin! Or, never mind, I think I can manage best without your aid."

As he spoke, Jack jumped upon the mound of earth which he had dislodged, and fairly got up into the hole excavated.

Here he screwed himself into as small a compass as possible, and began his operations upon the brick wall.

As he had said, it was far gone in decay.

The mortar in between the bricks had totally lost its adhesive quality, and was like so much paste.

Jack picked as much of this out round one brick as he could, and then, applying a pressure, strove to force it out.

But he found that would not answer, so he threw down his sword, and took out his clasp-knife.

The blade of this he inserted in the crevice round the brick, and used it in the same fashion as he would a crow-bar, and to his great satisfaction, the brick moved.

In a few minutes he got it out.

His task was then comparatively easy.

The displacement of this one brick was a key to all the rest, and down they came one after the other, with incredible rapidity.

But behind the first course of bricks was another, and these seemed drier and stronger than the others.

The success, however, which had attended his efforts so far inspired Jack with courage, and he attacked this inner wall with great intrepidity.

As in the former instance, he first of all got one brick out, and then the others followed.

When he had made a breach about a foot in diameter, he could not resist the temptation of looking to see what kind of place it was beyond, before he went any further.

Accordingly he took the taper from the hand of Edgworth Bess, and projected it through the orifice.

He was a long time before he could distinguish anything, and then what he did see was not very satisfactory.

It appeared to be a kind of vault.

He communicated this intelligence to his companions, and handed back the light.

Still undaunted, however, Jack continued his labour, and in less than ten minutes afterwards he had enlarged the hole sufficiently to allow them to pass through it.

Then he got down into the passage.

The exertion he had gone through was immense, and the perspiration literally streamed off him.

Blueskin was better, and when he saw how much his comrade had accomplished he took heart, and climbed up to the opening himself.

Having done this, he asked for the light, and announced his intention of getting through and finding out what the place was into which it led.

To this Jack offered no objection.

He was much exhausted, but in spite of that he could not keep still, but crept down the passage in order to listen whether there were any sounds which indicated the proximity of his foes.

In the meanwhile Blueskin crawled through the opening which was no larger than was necessary.

He found a bottom beneath his feet, and then he looked around him.

A glance was sufficient to satisfy him as to the nature of the place into which he had penetrated.

It was simply a cellar beneath a house.

Having made this discovery, he did not wait to do more, but climbed through the hole again.

It was lucky he did so.

As soon as he reached it he heard Jack say in accents of alarm.

"Quick—quick, my friend. We are only just in time. Wild's men are searching the vaults, and are even now in the passage, or else one that closely adjoins it."

"Come on, then. I think we shall elude them after all."

"What have you discovered?"

"That we have made a way into a cellar."

"Capital, then we shall be able to make our way into the street."

"I hope so. Bess, dearest, you will, after all, be saved."

The poor girl uttered a cry of joy.

But it died away upon her lips as the sounds of Wild's men came, even there, upon her ears.

"Do not be alarmed," said Jack. "Let me lift you up, and then you will be able to take hold of Blueskin's hands, and he will draw you up in safety."

Edgworth Bess consented, and Jack raised her in his arms in the best manner he was able.

Blueskin stuck the wax taper against a portion of the broken masonry, and, leaning down, he took hold of the hands which were held up to him, and lifted her up as gently as he could.

Jack, too, lent his assistance, and, by the aid of both, the poor persecuted heiress was placed in safety in the cellar of the house into which they had made so singular an entrance.

The sounds of pursuit which had so alarmed them were now inaudible, but it was by no means safe to argue from that circumstance that their pursuers were not close behind them, nevertheless.

Not pausing, then, for a moment, they crossed the cellar.

It was rather spacious in its extent, and stocked with bales of some kind of merchandize, though of what description they did not look to see.

They were intent upon other things, that were to them of far greater importance.

Crossing this cellar, then, as speedily as possible, they came to a door which yielded to their hands, for it was not fastened in any way.

But it led merely into another cellar, similar to the one they had just left.

The only difference was, that it was smaller and empty.

At the end of it was a flight of brick steps, which, leading upward, and that being the direction they wished to take, our friends did not hesitate to ascend them.

But after mounting about a dozen steps, their further progress was stayed by a door which was immovable in its setting, and resisted the slight effort Jack made to open it.

The position of our friends was very equivocal, and they were to the full conscious of that disagreeable fact.

They had no idea whatever into whose dwelling they had made this surreptitious entrance.

And they were equally ignorant of what was on the other side of the door, and what danger they would incur when they passed through it, supposing they were successful in their attempt to do so.

More they did not dare to reflect upon.

The future was so uncertain that they did not dare to speculate upon it.

But this was certain.

They could not remain very long where they were, or Jonathan would be upon them.

Jack Sheppard knew this.

He knew he must act.

Had it not been for the incentive which the poor girl who was under his protection was to him, he would never have gone through what he had, or accomplished so many daring feats.

So, holding up his hand in an attitude commanding silence, he placed his ear against the panel of the door, and, as a preliminary step, listened intently, in order to

judge whether there was anything going on upon the other side of it.

But the silence of the grave seemed to prevail.

After listening for several seconds, and with the utmost intentness and acuteness, Jack came to the conclusion that, in that direction at least, there was no one to oppose them.

Then he took the taper and examined the fastenings of the door.

They were all upon the outer side, with the exception of the lock.

But that was so fixed that he could tell at a glance there was no hope of forcing it off.

He turned to Blueskin and asked him for his bunch of skeleton keys.

They were handed in silence and, looking at the key-hole, Jack selected one which he imagined would just fit.

It was a shade too large, but he quickly took another rather smaller, which he inserted and turned round.

The lock resisted for a moment, and then flew back with a snap that sounded quite alarming in the profound silence.

In itself, however, the noise was but slight, still Jack thought it prudent to suspend operations a few minutes while he listened to ascertain whether any alarm had been given.

But all seemed well, so, gently and cautiously, he opened the door.

All was darkness beyond.

Emboldened, then, he pushed the door wide open, and crossed the threshold.

Blueskin ventured to follow, bringing Edgworth Bess with him.

He raised the taper in the air, and gave a glance round him, so as to learn in what kind of place he was.

It was a small chamber, and the use to which it was put was obvious.

All round it shelves were ranged, and upon most of these were eatables and drinkables of various descriptions.

There was a door leading out of it and a small window.

These things were perceptible at a glance, and Jack said—

"I think the best thing we can do now is to spend a minute or two in loading ourselves with these provisions here."

"So do I, Jack," replied Blueskin. "It won't take long, and between us we can stow a great deal away."

"And who can say how soon we may stand in need of food, and, perhaps, not have the remotest probability of getting any."

While the remainder of this little conversation continued, both our friends busied themselves with cramming their pockets with eatables of various kinds, and, in the course of a minute or two, they had laid in a considerable supply.

How to get out was now the next question, but it was soon answered.

They would get out by the door.

To their joy they found it was unfastened, so much time and trouble were saved.

Besides which, the circumstance reminded Jack of something which he ought to have done before, but which there was still plenty of time to do, and that was to properly secure the door at the top of the cellar-steps, so that their foes should have some degree of trouble, at any rate, to pass through it.

When the door leading out of the pantry was opened, the three fugitives found themselves in a kind of underground kitchen.

But in this place, which was not quite so dark as the pantry, there was no one to be seen.

It was early morning, and the inhabitants of the house were not yet astrir.

The same care was taken to fasten the pantry-door.

The key was sticking in the lock, so Jack turned it as well as shot two huge bolts into their sockets.

With all speed they now made their way across the kitchen, and passing through the door, they arrived at the foot of a flight of steps.

These they did not hesitate to ascend.

They terminated in what was called the hall of the house.

No consultation had been held as to what they were to

do next, nor was anything decided upon, but Jack and Blueskin instantly and unanimously decided that their best course was to get out of the house as quickly as possible, lest if they lingered Jonathan Wild should take such measures as to make it impossible for them to do so without falling into his hands.

But though they came to this resolution there were many obstacles to the achievement of it.

Of course, our friends had no idea of what kind of house they were in, nor of who inhabited it.

Neither could they tell whether it was a private residence or a shop, though they conjectured the latter, in consequence of the merchandize which they had seen stowed away in the cellar.

They did not stop to speculate, however, but taking a hasty glance, endeavoured to decide which was the front of the house and which the back.

Keeping in view the direction they had come, they found that, if their calculations were correct, a turn to the left, after reaching the top of the stairs, would lead them to the front door.

Accordingly they proceeded in this direction, and to their great satisfaction they found they were quite right.

They came to a door, and opened it with the aid of a skeleton key.

This done, they passed through it, and found themselves in what was evidently and unquestionably a shop.

Drapery goods were ranged on shelves all round it.

But bestowing only a hasty glance on these, our three friends, with beating hearts, bent their steps to the shop door.

As the reader must be aware, people when securing their premises at night, although they take every precaution calculated to prevent the entrance of any one, still they very rarely trouble themselves to prevent any one leaving.

So this shop door, which was provided with a complicated series of fastenings, was easily undone from the inside.

One by one, Jack Sheppard noiselessly removed them, until at length he had nothing to do but to lift a latch and fling the door open.

Having reached this point, however, he hesitated.

To have thrown the door open and emerged at once would have been unwise.

Somehow or other their pursuers were very tardy.

What was the meaning of it.

Was that a part of Jonathan's plan?

Perhaps so, for he was a scheming, long-headed man, and nothing pleased him so much as to lull his intended victims into a sense of false security, and then suddenly pounce upon them.

Or was the delay occasioned by the difficulty they found in following the fugitives?

These are questions to which time alone can furnish a reply.

It has taken us some time to relate the proceedings of the three fugitives, but then we have described them in full.

In reality, however, they occupied a much shorter space of time than it has taken us to relate them.

But yet, for all that, one would have thought that Jonathan's men, having been once fairly on their track, had had time to come up with them, or at all events to make some demonstration of their proximity.

But all was still.

CHAPTER CCXXXIX.

BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, AND EDGORTH BESS HAVE TO RUN THROUGH LONDON STREETS FOR THEIR LIVES.

AND so, with these considerations weighing with full importance on his mind, Jack Sheppard stood like a statue with the latch of the door in his hand.

One step and he should once more be in the open street.

But what if he should find lying in wait for him outside the door several of Wild's men?

It was not at all unlikely.

And so he waited and listened.

His two companions in misfortune fully understood him, and they both maintained motionless attitudes, scarcely even allowing themselves to breathe.

From without there came no sound.

But suddenly from within there arose a terrific crash.

Jonathan's men were in the house.

There was no longer time for hesitation.

If any men were lying in ambush they would have to run the risk of that.

Slowly—cautiously—noiselessly—for his presence of mind never deserted him in the least degree—Jack Sheppard raised the latch, and pulled open the door.

When he had got it open to the extent of about an inch he paused again, and looked through the crevice.

Nothing, however, but the dim outlines of the buildings on the opposite side of the street, rendered dimly distinguishable by the first faint sickly rays of early dawn, met his gaze.

From this he gathered confidence, and threw the door open still further.

Then passed out.

His heart beat quickly as he crossed the threshold, but no attempt was made to capture him.

He was instantly followed by Blueskin and Edgworth Bess, and then the three fugitives stood once again beneath the sky, and felt the cool air of heaven breathe upon them.

A sigh of relief came from their lips, and they felt thankful that so far they had eluded their powerful and much-dreaded enemy.

But what were they to do?

Friendless and homeless they stood in the silent street.

There was nowhere for them to go.

The hands of all the world were raised against them.

How were they to hope to continue so unequal a contest, or, at any rate, hope for victory?

Every chance seemed against them, and yet so tenacious is the human mind of hope, that in this dire extremity of their fortunes, and when things looked so black against them that they could not possibly look blacker, hope did not desert the breasts of either of our friends.

On the contrary, the fact of their having achieved so much in safety, seemed to inspire them with confidence to dare the rest.

Who would have thought that they would have been successful in getting free and unmolested into the open air? and yet they had done so.

It was only for a second that they paused in the street irresolutely.

They were aware how dangerous that spot was to them, and that the sooner they could get to a distance from it unperceived, the better it would be for them.

It was Blueskin who first spoke, for he was the one who first recognised their exact situation.

"Quick, Jack!" he said. "Follow me, and take care of Edgworth Bess. I will lead the way, and I hope, ere long, we shall find a place of refuge in which we can remain until the vigour of the pursuit after us has abated."

As he spoke these words, Blueskin darted off, and Jack and his companion hastened after him at the best speed they could make, for they were apprehensive that they should lose sight of him in the darkness.

Blueskin turned round every corner he came to, taking care, of course, to preserve one direction, and not to double upon his steps.

This was a proceeding eminently calculated to make pursuit after them a matter of great difficulty.

Before they had gone far, however, they were unlucky enough to encounter a watchman.

Running hastily round the corner of a street at which his box was placed, Blueskin ran against it with full force.

He did not see the obstacle in his path until it was too late to prevent himself from coming into collision with it.

But yet he did not knock the box over, as he assuredly would have done if he had not diminished his speed a little; though perhaps, could he but have known it, the best thing he could have done would have been to push it over.

But he prevented this catastrophe.

The fact was, the superannuated old pauper, who was supposed to guard the houses on his beat from all harm, was very comfortably asleep inside his box when Blueskin came in contact with it.

Now, if it had gone over on to its face at once, it is clear that the watchman would have been disabled entirely, and could not have given our friends any further trouble.

But the watch-box, after several oscillatory movements, regained its perpendicular position.

The watchman, however, could not fail to be aroused from his nap, for the shock threw him forward on the seat, and the end of his nose came into violent contact with the wood.

With a kind of instinct he sprang his rattle, before he was more than vaguely conscious that something unusual had taken place.

At the same time, as he rapidly recovered his faculties, he commenced shouting murder and thieves at the very top of his lungs.

Jack Sheppard could not refrain from uttering a curse at the occurrence of this unlucky incident, for he knew how soon the alarm would spread from one watchman to another.

But he put a stop to the exertions of this one by sufficing him.

In some other portion of this history we have explained the meaning of this term.

But lest it should have been forgotten, we will describe what Jack did on this occasion.

As the old watchman sat inside the box making all the uproar in his power, Jack ran up to it, and by main force threw the box over on to its face.

It, as a matter of course, carried the watchman with it, and there he lay beneath his house, buried and unable to do anything towards effecting his own release.

But the box itself reached the pavement with a bang sufficient to arouse a whole neighbourhood; so, however effective it might have been so far as the watchman was individually concerned, it had that drawback.

Besides which, the alarm was already given, and this only served to increase it.

The watchman continued to spring his rattle in a most praiseworthy manner, but the sound was muffled.

"Come on, Jack," cried Blueskin. "Use your best speed. Put forth your utmost exertion. Hark how the watchmen are taking up the alarm."

They were indeed. In every quarter rattles were sprung, and then the trampling of feet followed.

Not only were the fugitives in imminent danger of being surrounded and captured by these, but the uproar raised could not fail to set Jonathan Wild upon the track—even supposing him to have lost it.

But Blueskin continued to run at full speed, and Jack and Edgworth Bess had no resource but to follow him in the best manner they were able.

Jack could manage pretty well, but the poor girl who was his companion, not only was suffering from extreme debilitation, but was not used to such violent exertion.

Still, the dread of falling into the hands of Jonathan Wild enabled her to keep up very well.

How fervently Jack wished that he was strong enough to lift her in his arms, and so save her from all this fatigue.

But such a thing was quite out of the question. Morning, too, was very close at hand.

Every moment they could see the light increasing, and distant objects coming more plainly into view.

Suddenly a man darted out from a side street. His attention had doubtless been attracted by the springing of the rattles.

He was just in advance of Blueskin, so he held out his arms and tried to stop him.

But he might as well have tried to stop an avalanche. Increasing his speed as much as he was able, and clenching his right hand tightly, Blueskin hurried on.

Too late the man made an effort to step aside. He received the reward due to his folly and interference.

Blueskin raised his arm, and, as he passed at full speed, he struck the man a terrific blow in the face.

No human being could possibly have withstood the effect of such a blow.

Down went the man like a shot. He lay in the road quite motionless.

Another second and Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess passed him.

From the steadiness with which Blueskin, in spite of all obstacles, persisted in keeping one direction, Jack argued that he had already settled in his mind what their destination was to be.

But this was only his opinion, and it might be incorrect; and he had no opportunity of conferring with his comrade, for he kept steadily ahead of them, maintaining about the same distance as he had done all through.

So quickly did he turn the corners that Jack and Edgworth Bess had some difficulty in keeping him in view.

They had the satisfaction, however, ere long of learning by the sound that they were rapidly distancing their pursuers.

The sounds of their footsteps had entirely ceased, and it was only occasionally that a cry was wafted to their ears.

At length even these ceased to be audible, and when they were, Blueskin slackened his speed, and allowed his two companions to come up to him.

All three were breathless, panting, and exhausted; so before they could speak to each other they were compelled to support themselves and pause a little while.

As soon as he could, however, Blueskin spoke, for he knew the proximity of time.

"Thank heaven!" he gasped out, catching his breath at intervals; "we are safe so far, and that you have been enabled to sustain the fatigue of so long a race. I was afraid it would overpower you."

Both Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess made an endeavour to reply, but failed.

They could not speak. Blueskin continued.

"Never mind answering me. Save your wind for a more valuable purpose. It is impossible to tell what may yet be required of you. However, close at hand here is a place where I have good hopes of being able to obtain temporary shelter, and that we must have, for we cannot keep up this sort of thing."

Jack nodded.

"I know the landlord of a public-house close by. I once rendered him an important service. It is very many years ago now, and he has more than once displayed his gratitude for it. I think I shall be able to interest him in our behalf, and induce him to find us with a safe refuge until we have to some extent matured our plans."

Jack nodded again.

"If you feel strong enough," continued Blueskin, "you had better follow me at once, because the sooner we are under a roof of some sort the better. You need not run, but proceed at a gentle pace. This will enable you to recover yourselves, and we shall be gaining time as well."

"I am quite able," said Bess, faintly; "but I hope we have not much further to go. If we have, I had better lie down here and die at once, for I am all but exhausted."

"Cheer up," said Blueskin. "Do not think of dying yet. It is but a couple of hundred yards at farthest that we have to go, and you can take your time."

"I will assist you, too," said Jack, speaking with difficulty, for his heart throbbed so from the excessive exertion he had just made, and made him feel as if every moment it must burst. "Lean as heavily as you like upon my arm, and I will assist you to follow Blueskin. It is very lucky that we have found a place at all. I can assure you it is more than I hoped for."

Edgworth Bess was, however, fully aware of the exhausted condition in which Jack was, and she refused to lean upon him as he had requested, though, at the same time, she felt how welcome such a support would be to her.

Jack Sheppard, though, would take no refusal, but insisted upon her complying with his wishes, and in order not to lose time in protracting a dispute, she gave way.

At a walk, then, they followed in Blueskin's steps.

By this means they recovered themselves in a great measure from their agitation.

They grew cooler, too, so that when they presented themselves at the place of which Blueskin had spoken, they would be the less likely to excite commentatorial suspicion.

When Blueskin said that the distance they had to go was only two hundred yards, he was scarcely correct, for it was nearly double that distance.

He was aware of that fact, but then he did not wish to dishearten the poor girl, who had already bore up against fatigue in so heroic a manner, by telling her that she had nearly a quarter of a mile to walk.

But at last, and without the occurrence of any further danger, the distance was performed, and the little party

halted before an inn the appearance of which, outwardly at least, was tolerably respectable.

There was one thing that looked rather remarkable, however, and which served to militate against the general appearance of respectability which it bore.

And that one thing was that, though the hour was such an early one, wanting nearly an hour of sunrise, the inn was open.

The shutters were down and the front door wide open, as though it was quite early in the evening.

There was a light in both the rooms on either side of the door, but a dingy-looking blind was drawn so closely down that any attempt to have gained a peep at the interior would have been fruitless.

In what part of London they were Jack had no idea. Even with his intimate knowledge of all localities, he was at fault.

About one thing, however, he was quite sure, and that was that he had never visited that part of the metropolis before.

Looking up, he saw in front of the inn a projecting sign, which creaked dismally as it swung backwards and forwards in the light morning breeze.

He made an attempt to learn the name of the inn, for he could see there was something painted on the sign-board, and that there were letters underneath it, but more than that he could not see, owing partially to the insufficiency of light which fell upon it, and partly to the fact that the painting and the letters were nearly half obliterated.

Jack took this in at one hurried and hasty glance, for Blueskin did not make any pause, but walked straight up to the door of the inn.

He entered, and was closely followed by the two sharers in all the previous perils of the night.

Whether they were to end for a little while or to commence with redoubled activity was a question which they did not care to ask themselves.

CHAPTER CXXI.

JONATHAN WILD KEEPS WELL UPON THE TRAIL OF THE THREE FUGITIVES.

THERE was no one in the passage of the inn when our three friends entered, but the sound of their footsteps appeared to be heard, for a door was opened and a man came forth.

He carried a candle in his hand, for the interior of the inn was quite dark.

The moment the light fell upon Blueskin's countenance this man, who was no other than the landlord of the house, gave vent to a cry of recognition.

He knew him in spite of the disordered state of his apparel.

"Ross," said Blueskin, "you know me, it seems."

"How could I ever forget you, Mr. Blake. I may not be quite what I should be, to some people's thinking, but still, for all that, I can't but remember where I should have been had it not been for you."

"You are in position now to repay me for whatever I may have done for you."

"Am I? Tell me what you require. Let me know in what way I can serve you, and if it is in the power of man to do it, I will."

"That's right, Ross," replied Blueskin, grasping him by the hand. "I thought I could trust you."

"Did you?"

"I did."

"You were quite right, then."

"I rejoice to find it so."

"But what do you require?"

"In the first place, ~~was~~ me and my two friends who are with me into some room where we can have a few minutes' chat with each other."

"That's soon done," said the landlord, in a hearty voice. "Come into the bar. There is no one in it, for they have all gone to bed beside myself."

"Oh! indeed."

"Why, you see, we are obliged to take it in turns. Sometimes I sit up, and sometimes my wife. But, come, follow me across the passage into the bar."

The landlord moved in the direction he had indicated as he spoke.

Blueskin raised his hand, and beckoned to Jack and Edgworth Bess to follow him.

As soon as they were all fairly inside the bar, the landlord set the candle down upon the table, and closed the door after them.

Then, placing chairs, he requested them to be seated.

But, before he followed their example, he took good care to put upon the table an ample supply of refreshments.

A draught of the capital October ale, which was poured foaming out of the tankard, did the poor exhausted fugitives a world of good, and Blueskin, as soon as Mr. Ross, the landlord, had supplied their wants and resumed his seat, spoke to him as follows:

"You are a downright good fellow, Ross—a downright good fellow. There are very few who would have acted as you have. In general, favours done are soon forgotten. But you are an exception, and a friend in need is a friend indeed, and that is just what you have shown yourself to be."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Blake; I wish everybody had as good an opinion of me as you appear to have, I should be spared a great deal of trouble, I can tell you. But never mind compliments. Just tell me in what way I can be of assistance to you."

"That is a straightforward, business-like manner of coming to it," replied Blueskin; "and if you will fill up your glass, I will tell you in a few words as I can all about it, for I am not afraid to place the fullest confidence in you."

Ross, the landlord, bowed, and filled up his glass as requested.

"When you saw me last," began Blueskin, "I was Jonathan Wild's head man."

Ross nodded.

"His second in command, in fact. Well, since that we have quarrelled."

"Quarrelled?" said the landlord, pushing his chair back. "Quarrelled with the great Jonathan Wild?"

"Yes."

"That was a very bad piece of policy."

"Perhaps so."

"Now, I always take all the pains I can to keep in with him."

"I can't blame you for doing that, Ross. It is very wise of you; but still, for all that, we have quarrelled; and the long and the short of it is—I am no longer in his employ."

"Oh!"

"I need not tell you all the particulars, for it would take up too much time. But, at any rate, you will understand me that Jonathan and myself are sworn foes, and he is using every effort he can think of to capture me, and bring me to Tyburn."

"Oh!" said the landlord, again.

"I have just now had the greatest trouble in making my escape from him, but I have succeeded in doing so, and I may safely say that we reached here untracked."

This announcement seemed pleasing to the landlord, for he gave a sigh of relief.

"Now, Ross, you see these two who are with me. They are particular and dear friends of mine, and, like me, Jonathan Wild is their deadly enemy, and he has for a long time now been endeavouring to compass their destruction. But, up to the present moment, all his schemes have proved abortive. We are here in safety. But we are weary. Now, Ross, in return for the services I have at various times done for you, I ask you to give us a few hours' shelter, so that we can rest ourselves and depart."

"If that is all you want, you shall have it, and you are heartily welcome, too. I need not tell you, however, that I am running a great deal of risk, and I hope, of course, that you are satisfied Jonathan Wild has not seen you enter here."

"I think I can safely give you the assurance that neither himself nor any of his men observed us, and I think we shall be quite safe here for a few hours. Of course, it would not be prudent to stay long. You know what a man he is. But this lady who is with us, and who has received at Wild's hands the cruellest treatment, is wearied down and exhausted for want of sleep and food. A little while, however, will restore her, and she will then be better able to cope with her evil fortune. Come, Ross,

I do not want to press this matter on you, but tell me, yes or no, whether you will grant my request."

"To be sure I will. I know how to be sensible for a kindness, and, if I can hide you from Jonathan Wild, I will. Now you are here, however, fall to and eat as much as you can. You need not fear being interrupted, for this is a very slack time with us. Presently I will take you upstairs, and there you are at liberty to stay as long as Jonathan will let you, or you think proper."

"Thanks, Ross—thanks. Take my word for it, you will lose nothing by our acquaintance. I should not have asked you, though, only we were terribly hard pressed, and all at once I thought about you."

"Well, fall to—fall to. Eat and drink as much as ever you like now you have the opportunity."

"We will do justice to your invitation, never fear."

"Do—do. It is not made for the mere sake of making it, I assure you."

"I am aware of that, Ross."

"Are you sure there is nothing else I can do for you besides what you have mentioned?"

"Nothing, thank you, without you could find me a trusty messenger."

"Where to go to?"

"Little Earl-street, Seven Dials."

"That is a long way from here."

"I know it."

"What do you want this messenger to do?"

"Deliver a letter."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing, except to wait a few moments and bring back a reply."

"And is it very necessary this letter should be transmitted?"

"Very; the person to whom it would be addressed is a friend of ours, and he arranged to have three horses waiting for us at a certain place, but from some cause or other he failed to keep his arrangement. At least, we were very much behind our time, and, when we went to the place appointed, there were no horses to be found. Of course, if there had been, we should have been far away by this time."

"I understand. Then you want to apply to this man to send you the horses here?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you like, I'll tell you what I will do."

"What?"

"Take the letter myself."

"Will you really?"

"With your consent."

"It is just what I desired, only I did not like to trespass so much on your good nature as to ask you, but, now you have volunteered, it is quite another matter."

"I shall be quite willing to go. The fact is, I have some business to transact which will take me as far as Charing Cross, and it is not a great distance from there you know."

"Not ten minutes' walk."

"Then, if you like, you shall write the letter now,—I will furnish you with materials, and when it is done, you can all go upstairs, and I will answer for it the secret of your being here shall be kept well enough."

"I will trust you, Ross—I will trust you."

"You can do so safely. Here are all the things you need, so set about writing your letter at once."

"Here, Jack," said Blueskin, "you will manage that job best; you can write faster than I can."

"Very well. I'll write, if you like. What do you want me to say?"

"Tell Tumposki how surprised we were at not finding the horses at the place agreed upon, and how much trouble we have had in consequence."

"What else?"

"Tell him we are here, where we shall be able to find shelter for a few hours; and request him to fulfil his bargain, sending the three horses to this place as soon as it is dark to-night, so that we can carry out our original intention."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"I'll soon have that done, then."

Jack Sheppard had received a tolerably good education, so he wrote the letter in a very little time and with a very little difficulty.

At last he folded and sealed it up, then addressed it to Aaron Tumposki, Little Earl Street, Seven Dials.

When this much was done, Blueskin took the letter and handed it to the landlord with many injunctions to be sure and not lose it, and to deliver it to no one but the person to whom it was addressed.

The landlord promised obedience, and carefully placed the missive in one of the inmost recesses of his pocket-book.

He then led the way upstairs.

Our friends had well satisfied their hunger and thirst with the bountiful good things which had been placed before them.

It was by this time quite daylight, so there was no need to carry the candle with them.

It was Jack who had the thought to suggest something to Blueskin which otherwise would never have occurred to him.

"Blue," he said, in a whisper, "has the old man got a wife, or any daughters, or anything of that sort, eh?"

"I don't know."

"Ask."

"What for?"

Jack pointed to Edgworth Bess.

"I understand," he muttered; then, in a louder tone, he added, addressing himself to the landlord as soon as they reached the first landing—

"Ross, are you married?"

"Eh?"

"Are you married?"

"Lor' bless you! yes. Haven't you never seen my old woman?"

"No."

"Then you never will."

"Why?"

"She went dead about three months ago, and now I am a forlorn widower."

"You don't seem to have grieved much; but have you got any daughters?"

"In course I have; two."

"Grown up?"

"Oh! yes."

"Are they in the house?"

"Yes."

"Then oblige me by calling them up and letting them attend to this young lady, who stands in the utmost need of their assistance."

"Certainly—certainly. The lazy buzzies! they ought to be up by this time. Here, Susan—Jane!"

The landlord pronounced the two names in a tone that amply attested to the strength of his lungs.

He was replied to almost immediately, and a door was opened, from which emerged two young girls—one rather older, and one rather younger than Edgworth Bess herself.

They were dressed, and ready to go downstairs.

They understood what was required of them without many words being said, and with that ease and freedom which is always apparent in young girls of about the same age, they made friends with Edgworth Bess, and withdrew with her into the room from which they had emerged.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard were placed in the adjoining room, so that, let what would happen, they should not be far from the young girl in whose fate they felt so warm an interest.

Here the landlord left them—the last words on his lips being a renewal of the promise to lose no time in conveying the letter to the Jew.

Blueskin and Jack were both very glad to stretch themselves upon the sofa and comfortable bed which were in the room.

As a precautionary measure, however, they determined to sleep and keep watch alternately, for they could not tell how soon Wild might make his appearance.

But the day passed over without any alarm occurring.

Edgworth Bess found the landlord's daughters homely and agreeable companions.

Everything that lay in their power they were only too glad to do for her.

And so that one day at least passed more calmly and comfortably for the poor persecuted heiress, than many a one had for a long time.

She slept well and soundly, and when she awoke paid



[JACK AND BLUESKIN IN SEARCH OF THE BURIED TREASURE.]

those few attentions to her toilette which it actually required.

It was long after midday when the landlord returned from his journey.

But the intelligence he brought was welcome enough.

He had seen Tumposki, and brought back a letter from that individual in reply.

Its contents were brief, and the purport was that three horses should be brought to the inn as soon as it was dark. They had been in Warwick-lane in pursuance of the arrangement, but the time having been considerably increased, and many of Wild's men lurking about, it was thought prudent not to wait any longer.

Things now looked very promising, and the intelligence having been communicated to Edgworth Bess, our friends awaited the coming of night with considerable impatience.

But they were doomed to be crossed and prevented from getting off so easily as they had anticipated.

Soon after sunset, and as they all three stood watching for the arrival of the steeds at one of the windows in the

upper story of the inn, they heard the trampling of horses' hoofs.

Not doubting for a moment that it was the approach of what they wished, they threw open the window and looked out, in order to assure themselves.

But who could conceive their horror and amazement when they saw Jonathan Wild, followed by a large band of his janizaries, draw up in front of the inn.

He saw them, too, for the thief-taker uttered a howl, and pointed to the window with the butt-end of his riding-whip.

CHAPTER CCXLI.

JONATHAN WILD IS CONFRONTED BY A STRANGE APPARITION ON THE RUINED BRIDGE.

EDGORTH BESS responded to Wild's howl of recognition with a scream, which she found it wholly impossible for her to repress.

Blueskin banged the window shut, and even as he did

so, he saw Wild alight recklessly from his horse, and hasten in the direction of the front door of the inn.

But before we proceed to relate what took place after his unexpected arrival at the inn, and before we relate how the three fugitives fared under this critical situation of things, we feel it to be a necessary duty to go back, and account for the thief-taker's inopportune appearance.

How he could have found his way there is at present a mystery, but it is one that will soon be cleared up.

It will doubtless be recollected that the last time we personally adverted to him was when he went over, from his own domicile, to the eating-house in Giltspur-street.

We have casually seen or heard of him several times since then, but that was the last that we said about his own adventure.

We will resume, then, at this point, and, in a few words, relate what happened to him afterwards.

Having made a hearty meal, and feeling very much better in consequence, he walked back home again.

On his return, there was some business which required his immediate attention, and this occupied him some little time.

His instructions relative to posting the spies had in the meantime been fully carried out.

Men in his employ, who were to be found in almost every part of the metropolis, were furnished with a full and accurate description of the three fugitives, and ordered to keep a careful watch.

The business over, then, Jonathan himself, who was restless and uncomfortable, strolled out, in order to see that his instructions had been properly attended to.

He was under the conviction, too, that those he sought were not far away, and hiding in some secure place.

He had traced them to that end of Warwick-lane which lies nearest to St. Paul's Churchyard, and there he had lost them.

But he was uneasy, for he knew he had missed them somewhere, so, like a sagacious dog who had lost scent of his game, he went to the same spot again, in order to see whether he could find anything to put him on the right track again.

In a moody manner, then, with his hands clasped behind his back and his head bent forward, he walked along Newgate-street to the corner of Warwick-lane.

Down this narrow and unsavory thoroughfare he turned, but he reached the other end of it without meeting with anything to recompense him for his trouble.

A choice of routes was now spread out before him, and he stood some moments in speculation.

He could have turned to the right up Amen-corner.

He could have turned to the left up Paternoster-row.

Or he could have kept straight on down Ave Maria-lane, and this would have brought him on to Ludgate-hill.

But there was nothing whatever to be seen that in any way served to assist him in his deliberations.

Quite by chance, then, for there was nothing else to guide him, he resolved to take this last-mentioned route.

Upon emerging on to Ludgate-hill, he turned to the left in the direction of St. Paul's.

While wondering what place the fugitives were likely to select as offering a good chance of concealing themselves, he glanced up at the cathedral.

But, though his gaze rested upon the huge edifice, yet not for one moment did the idea strike him that within that very building were the three persons for whom he sought.

He turned the corner of the churchyard, then, following pretty much the same course he had previously taken when our friends had so narrow an escape of capture at his hands.

While walking in this moody manner along the north side of the cathedral, with his face turned towards Cheap-side, he suddenly experienced a shock.

Looking up to see what had caused it, with a horrible curse upon his lips, he saw that a young girl had run against him, and that she was entangled somehow in his apparel.

But, quickly disengaging herself, this young girl gave a bound forwards in the direction of the sacred edifice.

But not before the thief-taker had seen her face.

For a moment, so intense was his astonishment, that he stood like one paralyzed.

Then, recovering himself, he placed a small steel whistle to his lips, which always hung at his neck, being suspended by a fine chain.

He blew it fiercely, and the signal was immediately responded to by the rushing of many feet.

That whistle was the means by which upon any emergency he summoned any member of his band who happened to be within hearing of it.

In an incredibly short space of time, then, he found himself surrounded by quite a party of his officers.

He did not utter a single word of explanation, but simply crying, "Follow me," he dashed into the cathedral, to the utter dismay of the old verger, who was at the door.

The men kept close to his heels.

Jonathan winked and blinked when he found himself in the dim obscurity of the cathedral, and strove vainly to find some trace of the heiress.

But there was none.

She had disappeared.

But Jonathan was not to be balked, nor did the size of the building give him the least uneasiness or despair.

Posting one of his men at each of the entrances, he, with the remainder of his band, commenced a rigid search.

He also sent off for reinforcements.

In every way he behaved more like a madman or a demon than a human being, showing not the slightest respect for the sacred character of the edifice he was in.

He overturned every movable object that came within his reach, and plunged his sword recklessly and furiously into every crevice and corner that he came to.

But it was all to no purpose.

All at once he bethought himself of the vaults.

No sooner did the idea occur to him than he compelled the verger to unlock the door and allow him to enter them.

Down the steep steps he went at headlong speed.

But the vaults beneath St. Paul's are of a rather ramified character, and it was no easy matter for any one to search them all through.

Moreover, there was nothing whatever to guide him as to the proper direction he ought to take.

Had he been less violent in motions than he was, he might, to be sure, have heard the slight noise which the fugitives made in excavating the earth.

And at least half-a-dozen times Jonathan was within a few yards of where they were at work, and yet each time he took a wrong turning, and missed them.

It was not, indeed, until some time after our friends had passed through the opening, that the thief-taker and his gang came upon the spot where they had been at work.

They understood all at a glance.

There was no longer any trouble about finding the track of the fugitives. There it was, straight before them, and they had nothing to do but to follow it.

Jonathan Wild was the first to rush forward, and scramble through the opening.

He had a dark lantern in his hand, and it was a lucky thing for him he had, or he would assuredly have fallen into the cellar.

But he descended into it without meeting with any accident, and he began to look carefully about him, while his men one by one crawled through the aperture, and, as they did so, aided him in the search.

Of course, it was a likely enough thing that the fugitives had gone no further than that cellar, and had hidden themselves therein. At least, Jonathan thought it likely, and, fearful of doubling upon his prey again, he caused a thorough examination to be made of the place.

But that search, so far from resulting in anything save letting the thief-taker know that those he sought were not there, only took up valuable time, and afforded them increased facilities for escape.

This will explain what puzzled Jack so much. He could not conceive what had caused the delay.

But, as we see, the cause was simple enough.

In this way, then, carefully looking about him as he went, and being rewarded at almost every step by evidences that the fugitives had only lately been that way, Jonathan kept on until he reached the shop.

Here the partially open door leading into the street, let him know that his prey had been more speedy than he

thought, and that they had once again got out into the streets.

But so far from feeling any despair or anger in consequence, Jonathan only rubbed his hands over one another, and grinned in that disagreeable fashion which was so peculiarly his own.

He had faith in the precautions he had taken.

He knew what a many different eyes were at that very moment looking out for them, and that they could not go far without being seen, and his receiving the intelligence of it.

But, for all that, he resolved to keep up the pursuit.

He would, however, never have succeeded in getting upon the track at all, had it not been for the encounter with the watchman.

The hubbub raised of course had the effect of attracting him to the spot.

But by the time he arrived there, the fugitives were again out of sight.

We know already that he did not overtake them.

Cursing his want of success, Jonathan at last relinquished the search.

He resolved to wait for some intelligence from his spies to reach him.

Accordingly he retraced his steps towards Newgate-street.

But as that place was at some distance, he despatched one of his men for horses.

He soon returned, and Jonathan and his gang mounted and turned their faces towards home.

It was now early morning.

The first rays of the coming dawn were just perceptible in the eastern horizon.

By no means pleased with himself, Jonathan rode at the head of his troop.

In accordance with his usual plan he took the most direct route back to his destination.

Just as the sun was rising and casting his first beams of yellow light upon the different objects around, the thief-taker and his party arrived at a part of the road where a stream flowed underneath it, which was spanned by a rude and ruinous-looking bridge.

Upon reaching this place the horse which Wild rode stopped suddenly, and reared in such a manner as would have thrown a rider less practised than the thief-taker.

But he maintained his seat, and struck the horse heavily.

Subdued and terrified by the violence of the blow, the noble creature became more still.

The remainder of the troop also came to a halt.

Then looking to see what it was that caused this interruption, Wild saw a few feet from him one of the strangest looking objects which could possibly be imagined; and he ceased to wonder at the terror which his steed had manifested.

Standing in the middle of the road was something

Which looked not like an inhabitant of the earth
And yet was on't.

By the garb which hung in tattering ribbons from her body, it might be conjectured that she was a woman.

Her hair was silvery gray, and streamed behind her in the early morning light in a dense mass.

It was so long as to completely cover the back part of her person.

A rude kind of cloak was thrown over her shoulders in which two holes had been roughly torn, and through which a couple of long bare, bony arms were thrust.

Her feet were in slippers, but it was easy to see that the whole of her apparel was of the flimsiest and scantiest nature conceivable.

The age of this woman appeared to be very great.

But then other causes besides old age might have conspired to make her so withered, so thin, so haggard, and so witch-like.

In her left hand she held a slender twig, torn apparently from some hedge.

For what purpose she carried it was a mystery, without she used it as a means of defence, but for that it seemed woefully deficient.

And it was not long enough nor strong enough to serve as a support to her steps while walking.

Her skinny and bare right arm she held extended at right angles from her body.

The hand was clenched, and one finger was pointed in a menacing and threatening manner towards the thief-taker.

The other hand, which grasped the stick, she held aloft in the air and pointed with it to heaven.

Then, in terrible shrieking accents and with furious gesticulations, which made even Jonathan Wild's cheek blanch, she spoke.

"Man of blood!" she said; "man of blood! you are here to meet your fate. I knew you would come! I dreamt of it, and you are here. You know me not, but I know you. Your deeds of evil are well known to me. But you are hurrying forward to your doom. You are hastening to it with all the speed you can, instead of flying and allowing it to overtake you! Man of blood! I warn you! I can see the end of all, and that end is not far distant—much nearer perhaps than you imagine. I see a scaffold—the triple tree at Tyburn. There is a huge and gaping crowd. I see them; they sway to and fro; they yell and howl as the victim for the day appears before them. I see his face—I see his face! It is the man of blood! It is Jonathan Wild, and they will hang him upon Tyburn tree, even as, years gone back, that same man of blood hung my husband. Oh! I see him, and the sight fills my heart with pleasure. His face whitens as the ordinary speaks, and his limbs shake under him so that he can hardly stand. Then I see the hangman; he grins derisively when he sees who is to be his victim. He holds the white cap in his hand—he draws it over the head of the man of blood! I see!"

So far Jonathan heard.

But no further.

All that had been said had been uttered with such extraordinary vehemence and rapidity, and the purport of her words was so peculiar, that the thief-taker, prompt to act as he generally was, had not been able to interrupt her.

But now, with a yell of the most infuriate rage, he struck his horse several sharp blows, and urged him forward.

The gallant animal which he bestrode was fiery and full of spirit.

He swerved, and reared, and pranced, but yet all the time he took his rider not one step nearer to the object which had so excited his passion.

The old hag waved her stick defiantly, and with extended arms shrieked out more words of menace and abodeance.

But she could not make her voice heard above the din which the trampling hoofs of Wild's horse created.

But having said all she wished to say, and feeling most probably alarmed at the fury which the thief-taker exhibited, she waved her stick and sprang over the low stone parapet of the bridge into the stream.

No sooner had the object which so terrified Jonathan's horse been removed from its path, than it gave one tremendous bound forward and sped away at a terrific rate.

In vain Jonathan pulled the rein and strove to check his headlong course. Terror had, for a time, made the high-spirited but docile animal insensible of all things else.

CHAPTER CCXLI.

GIVES A GLIMPSE AT SOME PARTICULARS CONNECTED WITH WILD'S EARLY HISTORY.

THE janizaries, who had one and all been much startled by this apparition and the words it uttered, no sooner saw Wild start off at the headlong speed we have described, than they clapped spurs to their own steeds and followed as fast as they were able.

Jonathan heard them thundering in his rear, and the sound seemed to alarm his own horse afresh.

In a very little time he found that all hopes of reining him in and checking his speed were at an end, so he simply held tight, and did his best to steer him clear of obstacles.

In this he succeeded, and, after a time, the horse quieted down, and once more became passive in his hands.

Then Wild drew up, and for about five minutes swore in a most awful manner at his men.

At the expiration of that time he ceased, but only because he was compelled by want of breath to do so.

His anger arose from the fact of their having followed him in the way they did.

He wanted them to have stayed behind, and either captured or slain the hag who had caused him so much mental and bodily discomfort.

But it was no good to think of turning back now at the hope of finding her again, because she had had plenty of time to get a long way from the spot.

Bidding them follow him, Jonathan continued on his way to his house in Newgate-street, where certain things connected with his general trade required his attention.

He had neglected his business a great deal lately, and, though the thief-taker was in no way dependent upon it, yet he could not avoid grieving a good deal.

"Curse it," he said. "It seems to be my fate that I am never to get any one about me that I can trust. I thought I had found what I wanted in Blueskin, but even he has turned against me. If he would come back and be to me what he has been, I feel that I could overlook all the past. But that cannot be, and it is folly of me to think about it.

"Other men," he continued, after a few moments' silence, "have sons who, as they grow up, replace them and serve them. But I am not as other men. I have a son—I mean I had one, for whether he is alive at this moment is more than I can tell. But he was a dolt—an idiot. So it is no good thinking about him. He might have joined his fortunes to mine to the advantage of both of us, but he elected otherwise. He is gone, but I wish—I wish he had been a son to me."

Jonathan Wild was human, and there were times when even he, iron-hearted as he was, grieved about his son.

It seemed to be one portion of the punishment attached to his evil doings to be in a state of isolation. He seemed to stand upon a pedestal, where there was room for no one but himself. Yet he longed for companionship and assistance of a confidential character in the numerous enterprises he had under hand.

But he was fated not to have it.

This son of his of whom he spoke, and to whom allusion has on a former occasion been made, was born him by his first wife.

We have touched but little upon the early biography of the great thief-taker.

But as this son of his soon afterwards made his appearance, and took a prominent part in the adventures which subsequently happened, it will, perhaps, be as well if we take this opportunity to bestow a hasty glance upon the thief-taker's early life.

Wolverhampton, in Staffordshire, has the honour of being the birthplace of this unparalleled miscreant.

His parents were poor, but respectable people, residing in that town.

Some of their descendants are, we believe, still to be found residing in the immediate locality.

But that has nothing to do with our story.

Had Jonathan been an ordinary kind of man, he would have lived and died as thousands of his forefathers did before him, with their name unknown to the world.

They had been content to travel in the rut in the highway of life in which accident had placed them, and never once thought of making the slightest attempt to raise themselves out of it.

But Jonathan was gifted not only with extraordinary strength and energy of constitution, but also with uncommon strength and energy of mind.

It is rarely that these two qualities are found united in one individual; but Jonathan was one.

At an early age his ambition manifested itself—though in a humble way.

Still it led to other things.

The other members of the family had been content to learn their father's trade—that of buckle making—in their native town, but Jonathan determined to go to Birmingham and learn it—that town which is frequently designated as the metropolis of the midland counties, and which was some twelve or thirteen miles distant from the place of his abode.

This was his first step.

And here let it be said that if fortune had been favourable enough to the future thief-taker as to draft him into the army, he would have unquestionably made in very many respects the best man in the force.

But fate decided otherwise.

In Birmingham, where he served his apprenticeship, he, like many another young man, fell in with a lot of dissolute people about his own age, and was ruined in consequence.

It is not our intention, however, to preach a homily upon Jonathan Wild, or to attempt to extenuate in any way the numerous and barbarous crimes of which he was guilty.

Let it suffice to say, at Birmingham he was first educated into the ways of villainy, and he proved an apt pupil.

In a little while he excelled all his companions in everything, so that at last he came to be looked upon as quite a head man amongst them.

And this was always his fate—to join others upon a footing of equality, and then to rise superior to them.

And we are not afraid to say that, had Jonathan Wild been trained right, he would have proved to be an ornament to society, instead of a disfigurement.

At length, to such a pitch did he carry his depredations in Birmingham, that he was compelled to fly.

Of course, the first place that would suggest itself to a man like Wild would be London.

To that city he resolved to repair, and he set out on foot to perform the journey.

He accomplished it.

But we should state here that, during his stay at Birmingham, which was of considerable duration, he became acquainted with a young girl, who was both virtuous and honest.

As Jonathan was a young man, earning good wages, and with a capital prospect before him, she consented to become his wife, and they were legally married to each other.

But at the time the young girl took the (for her) fatal step, she had no idea what kind of man he was to whom she had given her hand.

Soon, however, whispers of the truth reached her ears, but she refused to believe it.

Then came Jonathan's hasty flight to London.

He did not make her the companion of his journey—he did not even make her his confidant.

The poor woman, when she learned what had taken place, was distracted with grief. Her parents and friends whom she had offended by marrying Wild, turned their backs upon her, and she was cast upon the mercy of the world.

What was she to do?

Expecting very shortly to become a mother, what was to happen to her and to her child?

Still, for all that, with that fond devotion, of which a woman is alone capable, she loved her husband, and despite his treatment of her—his hasty flight—and the reports which were circulated against his good name—she determined to follow him to London.

She carried out her intention, and was so fortunate as to enlist the sympathies of a waggoner who was going to the great city, and he allowed her a seat in his conveyance.

For the reader must recollect that at the time of which we are writing—nearly a hundred and sixty years ago—there were no ready means of travelling to and from distant places, such as are in existence now.

The consequence was, that the poor wife reached London almost as soon as her reprobate husband.

She also succeeded in finding him out.

But where?

In Bridewell, where she was taken for being a beggar and a vagrant.

Wild received his wife with dogged sullenness.

While in this prison Wild's first child was born.

The one of whom we have made mention.

After a time the pair were liberated.

Jonathan was driven to many shifts for a living, and at last, finding thieving to be the easiest, he adopted it, despite the remonstrances and presages of his poor young wife.

And so things went on.

In time, Jonathan made the glorious discovery that it was better to act as thieves' agent than thief; that, in fine, he should reap the best harvest by constituting himself a sort of middle-man between those who thieved and those who were robbed.

And this was the beginning of that monstrous system,

which he carried to such a pitch that the legislature were compelled to interpose and suppress it.

Jonathan did an enormous business.

But we have already made the reader acquainted with most of the ramifications of his trade, so it is needless to refer to them here.

This wife and mother then lived with Jonathan for some time, but at length he killed her in a fit of drunken passion.

He had had many a mistress since then, and the last one was Mary Milliner, whose end the reader has already seen.

But this son, as he grew up, proved to be a great trouble to Jonathan Wild.

It would not be going too far to say that he inherited all his father's bad and evil qualities, without any of the redeeming ones.

His was a fierce, untameable spirit, and one that fairly got the master of the great thief-taker.

He had, however, tried to bring him "up to the business," for so he designated his nefarious traffic.

This son, then, whose Christian name was George, was accordingly initiated into the mysteries of the office in Newgate-street.

For a time all went well.

Jonathan was delighted.

He thought that at last the trouble he had had with his son was over.

He fancied he beheld in him one who would shortly become a most able coadjutor and ally.

Delusive hope.

The darling son wormed his way into the whole of his father's secrets, and by pretending to interest himself in the proceedings, elicited everything.

The thief-taker took him entirely into his confidence.

And what was the result?

Just what might have been expected from such a spirit.

He took advantage of one of Jonathan's long absences, and packed up into as small a compass as possible the principal portion of his father's wealth.

Then absconded with it.

He had been an apt pupil!

The numerous lessons in villainy and iniquity which Jonathan had given him were not thrown away.

They all recoiled upon the teacher's head.

That was a just retribution.

This son, then, knowing the means at his father's command, took measures to destroy them accordingly.

He laid all his plans—made every arrangement for an immediate and rapid flight.

Then, when he had the booty safe in his possession, he lost not a moment, and was almost out of the country before Wild discovered his loss.

The impotent anger of the thief-taker was terrible to witness.

He made instant search for his son.

But vainly.

And so Jonathan's iniquity had recoiled upon his own head.

He little thought when he was giving lessons to his son that he was preparing a rod for his own back, and that the first person who would reap the benefit would be himself.

As we have said, the thief-taker's anger was terrible.

He suddenly found himself despoiled of the savings of many years.

Of wealth obtained only by a constant exposure and risk of his life.

Money enough to have enabled him to retire a rich man.

Now it was all swept away.

He would have to begin life afresh.

Registering a fearful oath of vengeance, however, against his son, Jonathan Wild, with his usual indomitable energy, set about his task afresh.

And, what was more, he succeeded, for he amassed wealth more rapidly than before.

And all the while he had heard nothing of his son.

But there were times when, as we have recorded, Wild could not help wishing that his son had been to him all that he might have been.

This was when he felt the want of some one whom he could trust sufficiently to take his place.

And so on the present occasion he felt the loss of some

one trustworthy, and how advantageous it would be to him if he could have a substitute.

And so, with the thoughts of this son of his occupying his mind more than they had done for many a long day, Jonathan Wild moodily took his way towards Newgate-street.

It may be that the words which had been uttered by the mysterious old woman upon the bridge, and which seemed to have such an evident connexion with his own fate, had some effect upon his mind.

Certainly his thoughts went far back into the past.

But little did he think that this son of his was so close at hand as he actually was, and that he would so soon make his appearance.

Whether as a foe, or whether as a friend, time alone can determine.

Without the occurrence of any particular incident calling for recollection at our hands, Jonathan reached his own house in Newgate-street.

There he remained for several hours during the day, wholly immersed in his business.

Towards four o'clock in the afternoon he was made the recipient of some intelligence which produced a remarkable effect upon him.

He armed himself—called out his men—mounted them—and set out at their head at full speed.

His destination was the inn where the fugitives had found a refuge, and to which they had been tracked by some of his myrmidons.

CHAPTER CXXLIH.

JONATHAN WILD CAPTURES THE THREE FUGITIVES AT THE INN.

WE have seen how, as they stood incautiously at the window of the inn, awaiting the arrival of the horses, Blueskin, Jack Sheppard, and Edgworth Bess were seen by Jonathan Wild.

This put an end to all doubt respecting the correctness of the information he had received.

With a yell, then, which might have come with better grace from the throat of some ferocious animal than a human being, the thief-taker threw himself off his horse and called to his men to follow his example.

All this the fugitives had seen with horror imprinted upon their features.

In what way were they to escape the clutches of the thief-taker?

The horses had not come, and, if they were to arrive now, they would not be able to avail themselves of them.

What could have brought Jonathan there they were unable to conceive, for, of course, they were in ignorance of the facts with which the reader has been made acquainted.

They inclined to the belief that his presence there was the result of accident alone, and that he would never have known where they were hiding themselves if they had not unluckily been present at the window.

But Jonathan's information was rather precise, and, even if he had not seen them in the way he did, he would not have gone away from the inn until he had thoroughly searched it in every part.

But now he had the proof which his own vision afforded that they were in the building, and his heart rejoiced, for he felt that at last his pains were rewarded, and that he had got his prey within his grasp.

And indeed the position in which our friends now found themselves was by far more critical than any in which they had hitherto been placed.

In what way were they to hope to escape?

Jonathan's first step was to post his men at various points round the house, so as to command a view of the whole premises.

Then he stalked into the hall of the public-house—and that was the first intimation Ross, the landlord, had of his presence.

Upon seeing him, however, he expressed his astonishment by a low, faint whistle, while he looked the very picture of dismay.

Jonathan enjoyed his discomfiture amazingly.

He leant his arms upon the ledge of the bar window, in which Ross stood.

He held a cocked pistol in a negligent manner in his right hand.

Then, in his growling voice, he said in a tone and manner which he intended to be facetious to a degree—

"Good morning."

The landlord could do no otherwise than reply to the salutation.

He used precisely the same words.

Jonathan grinned.

"You know me, I suppose," he added.

"I have seen you before, sir."

"Ah! then you know me, of course. No one ever mistakes or forgets me if they only get one good glance at my face."

"Yes, sir."

"And I know you," replied Wild.

"Do you, sir?"

"Yes; and you are in rather an awkward situation."

"As how, Mr. Wild?"

"You know how."

"Indeed I don't, sir."

"What am I here for?"

"I am waiting for you to tell me, sir."

"Look here, Ross—for that is your name."

"I know that, and you might have known it if you had just looked up at the signboard that hangs outside."

"Bah! I suppose you know there is such an offence in law as aiding and abetting felons."

"I believe so, sir; but what has that to do with me?"

"Everything, as you will find."

"Indeed, Mr. Wild."

"Now, it's no good for you to deny it. You have at this moment concealed in your house three felons, whom you have aided and abetted."

"You make a mistake, Mr. Wild."

"Don't deny it."

"But I do deny it."

"I tell you they are here. I know it; I have seen them."

The landlord muttered an involuntary oath.

But a new idea struck him, so he went upon a fresh track.

He by no means wished to have a rupture with the thief-taker.

The reader will perhaps remember the astonishment he evinced when Blueskin told him that he and Wild were sworn enemies.

Moreover, he had expressed his opinion that it was the best policy to keep friends with such a man.

We shall see how he acted.

"I don't know who you have seen, Mr. Wild; but I can tell you this, that so far as my knowledge goes, there are no felons in this house, nor have I aided and abetted them."

"But, perhaps," replied Wild, with a leer, "if they were found here concealed in your premises, you would have a great deal of trouble in rebutting the charge if it was brought against you."

"I don't say but what I should, Mr. Wild; but I shouldn't think you would be the man to do me such a turn."

"Well, perhaps not. You see, it depends in a great measure upon your own behaviour."

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Wild."

"Why?"

"Because then all will be well."

"Very good; I am glad to hear that, Mr. Ross. But, understand me, I have got at my back a strong force of well-armed men, who never stick at trifles if I tell them not to do so. The house is thoroughly surrounded with them, back and front, and it would be impossible for a mouse to leave it without their knowledge."

"I have nothing to say against that, Mr. Wild."

"Very good again. Now then, tell me the truth. You will find that it will answer your purpose best. Do you, or do you not, know those people who are upstairs?"

"I do not, Mr. Wild."

"That is enough, then. I tell you that they are three felons, for whose apprehension a very large reward is offered."

"You don't say so, Mr. Wild? Well, I should never have thought it from their looks."

"Oh! shouldn't you?"

"Certainly I shouldn't."

"And you had no idea of it?"

"None, Mr. Wild."

"When did they come here?"

"Early this morning, Mr. Wild."

"Early this morning?"

"Yes."

"What did they say?"

"They asked for refreshments, and said they wanted to stop in the neighbourhood for a few hours, and asked me if I could find them accommodation."

"Oh!"

"So I told them yes."

"And you had no suspicion of their characters when you said yes?"

"Of course not, Mr. Wild, or I should have said no in a minute."

"Well, I hope you will be able to prove it."

"Shall I be called upon to do so?"

"Very likely, I think."

"But you could get me out of that little difficulty, Mr. Wild, could you not?"

"I don't know. Very likely I might."

"Ah! do, sir."

"Should you feel inclined to do anything in return?"

"Anything in reason."

"Very well, then, I call upon you to lead me up to the room in which they are concealed, and then everything shall be looked over. I will take the responsibility upon myself."

Ross, the landlord, looked rather uncomfortable when this proposition was made to him, though, of course, he more than expected it.

"Oh! yes, Mr. Wild. To be sure," he gasped, for he wished to save himself from the consequences of what he had done, and to serve Blueskin and his two companions at the same time. "Oh! yes, of course. They are upstairs."

"I know it."

"Oh! you know it?"

"Yes, didn't I tell you I had seen them?"

"I think you did, sir."

"Of course I did. I was just outside, and, happening to look up, I saw them all three at the window."

"Oh! d—m it."

"Eh?"

"I said, was that it?"

"Yes."

"They had a room upstairs, and that's where they are now, I daresay."

"Lead the way up, then, and don't make a noise. I and my bull-dogs will follow you."

Ross, the landlord, gave an inward groan, but what was he to do.

Besides, he thought, if they were captured, it would be no fault of his. The fact of his leading Jonathan to the door of the room in which they were could not possibly make any difference to them, because he knew the room already, whereas to himself the result would be very different.

"Lead on!" said Wild, "there's no occasion to hurry, I know, because it will be impossible for them to escape; but still, we may as well get the business over, so lead on at once."

"How dark it is going!" said Ross, as he stepped out of the bar; "why, it was lighter than this an hour later last night."

"It is growing dark," said Wild; "but, never mind, lead the way."

"Hark at that!" ejaculated the landlord, as he walked towards the stairs.

A terrific peal of thunder, which seemed to shake the house to its very foundations, preceded his words.

"Only a thunderstorm," said Wild; "you are not afraid of it, are you?"

"Oh! no, Mr. Wild, only it's not a very pleasant thing, you know."

"No more it is."

"There's the lightning, then!"

A vivid flash of lightning at this moment lighted up the staircase, and revealed the forms of Jonathan Wild's janizaries, who were crowding close behind their master's heels.

Then it left them in what seemed deeper darkness than before.

Jonathan himself did not like the turn that affairs were taking.

In spite of his bravado, he was always awed by a thunderstorm, and this is not at all remarkable, for a hundred and fifty years ago few people, except the well-educated, could be brought to believe that the tremendous strife of the elements proceeded from purely natural causes.

Now Jonathan was far from being in a position to claim the title of being a well-educated man, though he had rather more learning than his fellows; but there was a large amount of superstition mixed up in him, and every now and then it showed itself.

As he walked up the staircase after the landlord, although he allowed no sign of it to be visible, he felt very uneasy in his mind.

"Lights!" he cried. "Curse you all, you carry lanterns, don't you? Why don't you show a light in this infernally dark place?"

He spoke these words in a loud voice just as he reached an angle in the staircase, which was very dark indeed.

The men halted immediately, and produced their dark lanterns.

There was a moment's delay while they lighted them.

But this was soon accomplished, and then from the united lanterns there came quite enough light to illuminate the staircase.

In the meantime the landlord was pondering over the disagreeable position in which he found himself placed.

He had no wish that Jonathan should succeed in effecting a capture, and he was quite ready to do anything that would be likely to prevent his doing so, if he could only see an opportunity.

But it was in vain he cudgelled his brains.

He could think of nothing.

When the lanterns were fairly alight, they resumed their way up the stairs.

But still the lightning and thunder continued with unabated violence, indeed, if anything, the peals of thunder increased in loudness, and the flashes of lightning in brightness and frequency.

At length the room in which the fugitives were was reached.

Jonathan and his troop halted before the door of it.

"Is this the room?" asked the thief-taker of the landlord.

"It is, Mr. Wild."

"Very good. You have kept to your part of the bargain, and I will keep to mine. You shan't have any further trouble."

Then, going close to the door, Jonathan knocked loudly upon the panel of it.

But his summons was unanswered.

There was no more notice taken of it than if the room had been empty.

Wild next tried the handle.

It turned round, and he endeavoured to push it open.

It was fast.

He shook it in its frame.

"Surrender!" he cried. "Surrender! It is folly to resist, and make a foolish struggle to avoid capture. I am here in force. My men surround this house, so it will be impossible for you to leave it. Give in, therefore, and you shall be treated gently. Refuse and resist, and the consequences be upon your own head. I call upon you again to surrender. Surrender, I say!"

Jonathan waited a moment to see whether any reply would be made to this speech, which he considered a highly conciliatory one.

But no notice was taken of it.

Those within the chamber—if any were within it—were silent as if they had never heard a word.

This infuriated Wild, and he caught hold of the handle of the door again and shook it violently in its setting.

He hammered, too, with the butt-end of a pistol upon the panel.

But it was all to no purpose.

"There is no help for it," he said, at length, to the landlord. "You see, they are such obstinate people that they will compel me to break the door down."

"I hope not, Mr. Wild."

"I'll see that the damage is made good."

"Oh! it isn't that, but just think what a name my house will get. I wish you could capture them quietly."

"Well, I have tried, but, you see, they are determined to fight to the last. However, a thought strikes me."

"What is it, Mr. Wild?"

"Have you got a ladder on the premises?"

"I daresay we have, sir."

"Very well, then; I will go down with you and look for it. You, Smith and Goggs, remain at the door and see that no one passes out. Stop there till you have orders from me. The remainder follow me quietly down stairs."

With these words on his lips, Jonathan turned round and commenced the descent of the stairs.

The landlord did not dare to refuse to follow him, though, at the same time, his determination to aid the fugitives was unchanged.

CHAPTER CCXLIV.

RELATES WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE INN AFTER THE CAPTURE OF JACK SHEPPARD, BLUESKIN, AND EDGWORTH BESS BY JONATHAN WILD.

WITH the exception, then, of the two men who had been left to guard the door, the whole party went downstairs.

The landlord could not, of course, say no to any of Wild's propositions without throwing himself open to suspicion; so he made a point of readily conceding to every one of them.

Accordingly he led the way into the yard at the back of the inn, and looked about for a ladder.

The storm was still raging, though not much rain fell; still the clouds were very black overhead, and completely shut out the sky from view.

The ladder was found, and Jonathan ordered his men to carry it round to the front of the house—after giving a word of caution to those who were posted at the back not to relax their vigilance, but to keep as sharp a look out as possible.

The landlord now saw what Wild wanted with the ladder.

He had it reared up in the front of the inn, and put close to the sill of the window which looked into the room in which our friends were.

No sooner was it placed—and care was taken to do it as noiselessly as possible—than Jonathan sprang to the foot of it, and rapidly began to ascend.

His men followed quickly after him.

But we must leave him for a moment, while we more particularly revert to the proceedings of the fugitives who were in such a desperate strait.

And let not the reader be surprised when we say that they almost lost all hope.

No wonder that they should do so, for all their endeavours to get free from Jonathan Wild were unavailing.

Clasping her hands together, Edgworth Bess cried, in a despairing voice—

"Oh! what shall we do? Tell me, what shall we do? Or must I give up all hope, and resign myself once more to the fate of being made prisoner by that bold, bad man?"

"Do not despair yet," said Blueskin. "We will do our best to prevent such a thing, but I am afraid the odds are too much against us for us to hope for that."

"Oh! fly—fly. Let us fly."

"We cannot."

"The horses have not come; but yet we might go on foot."

"How far before Jonathan's men—who are well mounted—would come up to us? Besides, we should never have the chance of making the attempt, even if we were inclined."

"Why not?"

"I know Jonathan Wild well, and am quite certain that, having seen us here, the very first thing he would do would be to surround the house with his men, so that it would be utterly impossible for us to leave it without being seen by one or the other of them."

"Oh! I am distracted. Let us submit to fate. I am doomed to be his victim."

"Nay—nay, be calm. Recollect the old adage, 'all are not lost who are in danger,' and perhaps, even now, things may take a more favourable aspect than they appear to wear at present. Be calm, and leave all to us. We will do the best we can, both for your sake and our own."

"What shall we do, then?" asked Jack.

"I can hardly tell, but I should propose this."

"What?"

"That we should fasten the door and erect a barricade before it, composed of all the heavy articles of furniture in the room."

"Would it not be best to leave it while we have the chance?"

"No, I think not; for all we could do, if we were not captured on the stairs, would be to enter another room. As for leaving the house, I am quite sure that is an impossibility."

"I am afraid, then, that it is all over with us at last," said Jack.

"I fear so, but hope not. Our only chance lies with the landlord."

"Then it is a poor one."

"Not so! I think he would do his best to save us."

"But how is he to manage it?"

"That is more than I can exactly see. We must wait patiently."

"I think the best thing we can do is to erect a barricade. If it does nothing else, it will of course retard our capture."

"Come on, then."

It was at this moment that the three fugitives perceived the first indications of the coming storm.

Edgworth Bess, who was already alarmed, was much terrified by it, and Jack had no little trouble in soothing her.

Blueskin busied himself in moving the different articles of furniture, and piling them up against the door, thus forming a barricade that would be by no means easy to surmount.

In a little while, when Bess grew calmer, Jack came to his assistance.

In a few minutes, so energetically did they work, they had their task completed.

They would now have to patiently await the current of events.

Scarcely had they finished than Jonathan ascended the stairs, and spoke and knocked at the door in the manner we have recorded.

We have already seen that they took no notice whatever of his call for surrender.

With what anxiety they listened to him, however, the reader can easily comprehend, if he can for a moment imagine himself in their situation.

Then came Jonathan's retreat downstairs.

They heard it, and could not conceive what it meant.

Cunning they knew him to be, and they were certain this was only the commencement of some scheme by which he trusted to effect their capture.

Jack and Blueskin looked carefully to the priming of the pistols, and held them ready for immediate service.

Edgworth Bess, sobbing and crying as though her heart would break, crouched down upon the floor.

Poor girl, she was quite overcome, and really abandoned herself to despair. She felt that there was no longer room for help, and that it was futile to longer struggle against her adverse destiny.

Her two protectors, whatever their feelings might be, determined to defend her to the last gasp.

The little room in which they stood was profoundly dark, and it was only when a blinding flash of lightning shot across their vision that they were able to see each other.

But these transient glimpses thus obtained were terrifying to a degree to Edgworth Bess.

The booming of the thunder, which rattled fearfully—each peal seeming to grow louder than its predecessor—effectually drowned the slight noise which Wild's men made in rearing the ladder against the front of the inn.

They were in ignorance of these proceedings.

Both Jack and Blueskin had endeavoured to account for Jonathan having descended the stairs again, and the conclusion to which they both came, though a probable enough one, was very far indeed from being correct.

They fancied he had gone down in order to obtain something wherewith he could force the door.

The thought of his changing the point of his attack to the window never entered their minds, and the first intimation they had of his having done so was a terrific crash.

Looking round instantly to ascertain the cause of it, they saw that Jonathan had dashed himself bodily through the casement.

The first thing Blueskin and Sheppard did upon making this discovery was to fire both their pistols.

The darkness of the place prevented their seeing whether they had taken the effect they wished.

Jonathan was well supported by his janizaries, and they poured into the room with extraordinary rapidity.

Edgworth Bess sprang to her feet, and clung to Jack's arm.

He clasped her round the waist, and endeavoured to reassure her by a tender pressure.

Then they heard a voice, which to them was discord itself, cry—

"Don't fire, my men—don't fire. I want to take them all three alive and unhurt. We shall do it easily enough, never fear, for they can't get out. Don't fire, for fear you should wound one of them by a chance shot."

It was Jonathan Wild who spoke.

At the same moment he rushed forward.

Then a flash of lightning, of such intense brilliancy that the eyeballs of all seemed scorched by it, illuminated the room.

It was gone with that rapidity which is perceptible in nothing save lightning.

But, brief as was the light, it showed to our friends Jonathan Wild and his band of desperadoes.

They, too, were seen, and Jonathan noted the exact position which they occupied.

Then all was dark again.

But the janizaries one by one produced their lanterns.

They had not extinguished them, but merely placed them in the capacious pockets in their coats while they ascended the ladder.

Very soon, then, there was a constant light in the little chamber.

All the lanterns were directed upon one spot.

That was where the three fugitives stood.

Their forms were as fully revealed as if it was broad daylight.

They, however, had not the advantage of seeing their foes.

Indeed, all they could perceive were the round bright lenses of the lanterns.

In quick succession Jack and Blueskin discharged their remaining pistols at the dense throng before them, and then drew their swords—determined to fight to the last.

"Upon them, bull-dogs," shouted Wild. "Upon them! Rush upon them in a body, and they will be overpowered instantly. Down with them—but use no weapons but your hands."

On receipt of these orders the janizaries made a simultaneous and vigorous rush upon their prey.

It was in vain that Jack and Blueskin endeavoured to defend themselves with their swords.

They were borne down at once, for the impetuosity with which the bull-dogs rushed at them was irresistible.

In a moment they were all three upon the ground, with six times their weight of janizaries to keep them down.

There was no hope for them now.

In this position they were perfectly helpless.

With speed and dexterity they were handcuffed.

Then they were indeed prisoners.

Jonathan's eyes gleamed with triumph.

He had at last achieved that which had hitherto been attended with so many difficulties.

He could scarcely contain himself for joy.

Edgworth Bess was ready to swoon with terror, but with a great effort she retained her consciousness.

The dread of being insensible in the hands of Wild alone enabled her to obtain a mastery over the feeling.

Jack Sheppard was silent.

He could not have spoken had words been offered him—he was literally choked with vexation and disappointment.

It was the same with Blueskin.

Jonathan laughed triumphantly and discordantly as he took a lantern from the hands of one of his men, and flashed its light upon the persons of the three prisoners.

At last they were in his power.

He could scarcely believe it was real.

His joy was, however, extreme, and he swore a mental oath that they should not again escape him with life.

Then, turning to his men, he said—

"Clear away that rubbish before the door, and let us go downstairs."



[JONATHAN WILD HAS A FEW WORDS WITH HIS SON.]

His order was promptly obeyed, for his janizaries were quite as delighted as he to think they had succeeded in their object.

They trusted to its having an amiable effect upon their master's temper.

Alaciously, then, they set about their duty, and soon had the pile of lumber removed from before the door.

Then they unfastened it and flung it open.

The prisoners were then compelled to move.

Fearing that some violence would be offered to Edgworth Bess if they refused to move, Jack and Blueskin submitted to the wishes of their captors without a murmur or a struggle.

One by one they were led down the stairs under a strong escort.

Jonathan followed them.

Upon reaching the bottom, they stood for a moment in the passage.

The storm still continued; indeed, its violence was now much greater than it had hitherto been.

The flashes of lightning were more brilliant and incessant, while the peals of thunder were so loud as to cause a momentary deafness after they had subsided.

It was, moreover, now accompanied with such a deluge of rain, that it seemed as though some waterfall was descending upon the earth.

The interior of the inn was but poorly illuminated.

Ross, the landlord, however, stood near the bar door with a lighted candle in his hand, as the party descended the stairs.

Blueskin looked at him—not in anger, for he felt how utterly powerless the landlord was to prevent what had just taken place.

Ross was conscious that the eyes of his old friend was on him, and he allowed something to appear upon his features which Blueskin construed into a hope.

He fancied that the landlord would even yet do something towards effecting their release.

But how?

He could not think.

On reaching the passage, Jonathan stalked to the front door of the inn.

It was closed.

But he lifted the latch, and opened it.

The aspect of the weather without rather dismayed him.

As we have before said, Jonathan Wild had rather a horror of thunder and lightning.

Not only this, it was quite certain if ever he went out while that rain continued he would be wet through to the skin in less than a moment.

A curse came from his lips as he saw this.

He hated to be interfered with by anything or anybody.

He wished to make his way to Newgate-street with his prisoners with all speed, and on arriving there, to inure them in one of his dungeons, taking such precautions as would effectually preclude all possibility of their making their escape.

But under the present aspect of affairs it seemed next to an impossibility for him to do this.

And yet he felt that to remain at the inn until the violence of the storm had abated, would be to expose himself to a very great risk.

But the reader must not for a moment fall into the mistake of supposing that it was through any element feeling upon Wild's part with regard to his prisoners that made him hesitate about proceeding direct to London.

To be sure, Edgeworth Bess was only of value to him while she was alive, and that manifestly it was his best policy to take all the care of her he could.

The chief thing, however, that was present to his mind was the terrific nature of the storm.

And this was scarcely to be wondered at.

CHAPTER CCLV.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS GANG FALL EASY VICTIMS TO ROSS'S CLEVER PLAN.

It is only at very rare intervals indeed that such a storm as that was desolates the plains of England.

Jonathan was quite sure that never in all his life had he seen or heard anything like it.

The brilliant flashes of lightning seemed to show themselves without intermission, while the thunder roared incessantly.

And the rain.

It came down perfectly straight, and when it reached the ground, so violent was its descent, that it rebounded several inches.

The road, too, in front of the house, soon became quite flooded, for the earth could not absorb the moisture, neither could it run off in the provided channels as quickly as it came down.

For almost two minutes Jonathan Wild stood at the door of the inn beholding the strife of the elements.

Then, not being able to perceive the least signs of its abatement—fancying, on the contrary, that it increased—he turned away, closing the door after him.

Ross, the landlord, who still held the candle in his hand, came towards him.

The janizaries, keeping a tight hold upon the prisoners, had not moved from their station at the foot of the stairs.

In a most respectful tone of voice, Ross addressed the thief-taker.

"This is an awful storm, Mr. Wild," he said, "a truly awful storm, and I am afraid it is going to last a good while longer yet. Would you like to stop here a little while, Mr. Wild, for, if you were to go out, you would be quite drenched and blinded?"

"This is an inn, isn't it?" growled Wild.

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I can stay if I choose without anyone's permission."

"Certainly you could, Mr. Wild," replied Ross, determined, for the sake of our friends, not to take offence at him, no matter how offensive his remarks became. "Certainly you could stay, but I merely spoke out of civility. I only meant you were quite welcome to make use of my house if you thought proper."

"Oh! very well. We will stay until the storm gives over a little, or, at all events, until it shows some signs of doing so."

"Which it certainly does not at present. But where would you like to stay, for I am afraid I have not got a room large enough to accommodate the whole of you."

"Show us into the largest room you have got, and then we will do our best to make shift."

The landlord rubbed his head, and pretended to be confused.

"The largest room in the house, Mr. Wild, is the kitchen."

"The kitchen?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild, the kitchen."

"Then take us there at once, the kitchen will do as well as anywhere."

"I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Wild, and, then, afterwards, if you like to go down in the kitchen, you can."

"What is it?"

"Why, we are doing a great deal in the cooking way."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Then, that does not matter."

"All right, Mr. Wild, I am glad to hear you say so, only I thought I had better mention it."

"Bah! stuff! Lead the way, and we will follow. If we are to stop here half-an-hour we can't stand in the passage."

"Of course you can't, Mr. Wild. Be good enough to follow me, and I will lead the way."

Jonathan took no further heed of Ross, but called out to his men—

"Look sharp after your three prisoners, my lads, and follow me. They are slippery customers, you know."

"All right, Mr. Wild," was the response, and, as they spoke, the janizaries tightened their grasp upon their prisoners.

On their part, however, the fugitives offered no resistance, and had no thought of offering any.

They saw that, just at present, it would be worse than useless, for not only would it be impossible for them to release themselves, but, by making the attempt, they would only be likely to bring down upon themselves additional ill-usage and severity.

Accordingly, with a manner that was humble enough, they followed the janizaries whither they led them.

Poor Edgeworth Bess was quite cast down with grief.

All the terrible efforts she had made to escape from the evil genius of her life had been in vain.

She was once again in his power, and this time there was still less hope that she should be able to escape from him, because he would redouble his precautions to retain her in his custody.

Besides which, her two defenders and protectors were in the same predicament as herself.

So it was no wonder the poor girl felt so cast down as she did.

On the other hand, Blueskin was full of hope.

He relied upon Ross finding an opportunity to put them in the way of effecting their escape if they remained long in the inn.

He looked upon the conversation respecting the kitchen from this point of view, and felt convinced that it was but the prelude to some scheme which Ross had formed.

Whether he was correct or not, we shall very quickly see.

The whole party proceeded to this place, which was a long room, apparently added to the main structure of the inn by being built out into the yard.

As soon as they entered, their nostrils were saluted with a most savoury and appetizing smell, which proceeded from the culinary operations of which Ross had spoken.

The fire-grate was a huge one, and occupied the whole of one end of the kitchen.

By the directions of the landlord, additional chairs and benches were brought in, upon which the janizaries and their prisoners could sit down.

Then the apartment was still further illuminated by lighting some candles, which were stuck in tin sconces along the walls.

By the aid of these Wild was able to take in the general aspect of the place, which he did before he sat down.

When he did so, he placed a chair in such a position that, as he occupied it, he could observe every movement of the three prisoners, and, by holding out his arm at full length, almost touch them.

This, then, was the aspect of affairs on that eventful evening when things looked so black against our friends.

And still the storm continued with unmitigated fury.

After a time, as they sat down, the men, and Jonathan included, turned their eyes around them listlessly, because they had nothing to do.

As for Ross, he took good care to keep aloof.

Where he was, or what engaged him, none knew but himself.

Presently, however, he made his appearance in the kitchen.

"It's no good my sitting in the bar such a night," said his, Mr. Wild, waiting for customers, is it?"

"I suppose not."

"It's a most unfortunate thing for me, this storm is."

"How so?"

"Why, you see, a large party promised to come here to supper to-night, and that is the reason you see all this cooking going on. Now, do you know, there's as nice a piece of beef hanging before that fire as ever was put upon the spit, and there's a leg of mutton of equally good quality boiling in that pot over the fire."

"And I suppose you are afraid this storm will keep your guests away?" replied Wild, who had sat in his chair and looked at his prisoners so long that he was quite amiable.

"I am more than afraid, Mr. Wild; I am quite certain they will not come now. For who in the world would start out on a night like this for the nicest supper in the world?"

"Very true."

"And besides, most of them would have a long way to come; and even if the storm was to cease this moment, the roads would be in such a state that, for the next hour or so, they would be almost impassable. I was at the front door just now, and the rain seems to have regularly dug the earth up, and the depth of the mud is something more than I can tell."

"And about this supper?" said Wild. "Will all the loss fall upon you?"

"I am afraid so."

"That is unfortunate."

"I said so, sir; this storm is a most unfortunate thing for me."

"And for me, too," growled the thief-taker, "or else, by this time, I should have been a good way on my road to Newgate."

"Just so, Mr. Wild. But then you are not quite so bad off as me, because your prisoners cannot help being perfectly secure while you have got your own eyes upon them."

"Oh! very true. I don't say but what they are safe enough."

"Still, you would rather see them in Newgate?"

"Just so. But, Ross?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild?"

"You have acted very fairly and straightforwardly with me in this matter, and I am sorry to find you will sustain such a loss."

"Thank you, Mr. Wild."

"However, I don't mind having something for the good of your house, and as my bull-dogs have done their duty very well, and as they have got a long ride before them, why, they shall have something for the good of the house too."

The janizaries gave utterance to cries of unqualified satisfaction as they heard these words fall from the lips of their imperious master.

They found sitting there without anything to drink was very dry, uninteresting work.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Wild," replied Ross, "very much obliged to you; and no one will ever find me saying a bad word against you. What would you like to take?"

"What have you got?"

"Almost anything you like to mention, but there is one article in my cellar which I cannot help especially recommending."

"What's that?"

"Some prime old October ale of my own brewing. Perhaps I ought not to praise it myself, but I am quite sure, after you have once tasted it, I shall have no occasion to do so."

"Well," said Wild, "that will suit us, I fancy, as well as anything. You shall bring in half-a-dozen tankards of this ale you speak of, and serve it out all round to my men."

"Thank you, Mr. Wild," said Ross; and off he went, apparently in high glee, to execute this order.

He soon returned, bringing with him the half-dozen tankards, which he placed on the table, immediately in front of Wild, who said—

"Serve it out—serve it out."

Glasses were filled, and one given to the thief-taker.

The remainder were handed round to the band.

Ross performed this duty, but, as he did it, he never made the least offer to give the three prisoners any.

But then their hands were tied behind them.

Slight as this circumstance was, however, Blueskin took note of it, and the hope that, after all, they would escape, strengthened and strengthened in his mind.

But he allowed nothing of this feeling to be perceptible in his countenance.

The ale was drunk with great relish, and Ross filled the glasses again, and said—

"Mr. Wild, what do you think of the ale?"

"Very good; but I prefer brandy."

"Do you sir? I have got some of first-rate quality."

"Never mind. I will have another glass of ale, as I have had one already."

"Yes, Mr. Wild. Ah! look, now isn't that a sight to fetch the tears into anybody's eyes? Oh! dear!"

Jonathan turned round to see the sight referred to by the landlord, and saw the cook taking up the joints of meat, having quite despaired of the coming of the expected guests.

It certainly did seem a very great shame that such tempting and delicious viands should be spoiled, and yet there seemed no help for it, and Jonathan expressed himself to that effect.

"Would you like to have a snack, Mr. Wild," said Ross, as if struck with a new idea. "It's no good for it to spoil, and if you feel inclined I am sure you are very welcome."

"Thank you, Ross," said Wild, who had grown quite hungry through snuffing the cooking. "I don't see any signs of the weather improving, so I don't mind having a taste."

"Very well, Mr. Wild."

"Here, stop! Ross!"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll tell you what you shall do, and then, after all, you won't be such a very great loser."

"I should be glad to hear that, Mr. Wild. How can it be?"

"As I said before," replied Wild, who appeared, in a most singular manner, to grow more and more good-tempered every moment; "as I said before, I am very much pleased with the way you have acted all through this affair. You have given me every assistance. Then there's my bull-dogs, they have behaved themselves well. Now I think you ought both to be rewarded."

"I think I understand you, Mr. Wild."

"You shall serve the supper up to my bull-dogs and me, and sit down to it yourself, and we will reckon up afterwards for the lot."

"Mr. Wild," said Ross, "I am so obliged to you that"

But the remainder of his speech was drowned by the clamour which the janizaries made when they heard how munificently their employer was about to behave to them.

Probably no one was more astonished at seeing Wild in this vein, than Jack Sheppard.

It was quite inexplicable to him.

Even Blueskin, familiar as he was with the thief-taker and his ways, was puzzled. There was something extraordinary in this behaviour, he was sure.

Ross, however, busied himself, and soon had a tempting white cloth spread upon the table.

Upon this the viands were placed, and then Jonathan and his men drew close up to the table.

Jonathan's beneficence did not, however, extend to his prisoners.

He did not invite them to partake of the feast, and Ross, though he would have been only too glad for them to do so, felt how impolitic it would be for him to allude to it in any way, so he passed it over in silence.

Jonathan's janizaries were hungry.

It was astonishing to see with what rapidity the joints, both roast and boiled, disappeared, and as for Ross, he was quite kept on with carving.

The three fugitives had the pleasure of looking on upon all this.

More of the October ale which Ross had so strongly recommended was brought in, and full justice was paid both to it and to the esculents.

CHAPTER CCLVI.

JACK SHEPPARD, BLUESKIN, AND EDGWORTH BESS SUCCEEDED IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM JONATHAN WILD.

GRADUALLY the storm subsided.

The flashes of lightning became less vivid, and the rumbling of the thunder less tremendous.

The peals came, too, at much longer intervals.

But the rain poured down steadily enough, though not with the impetuosity which had before distinguished it.

Still Jonathan and his men seemed quite oblivious of it.

Surely that old October ale possessed some very strange and curious qualities.

In fact, the more they drank of it, the more good-tempered they grew, until, at length, they positively called upon Jonathan for a song.

All this our friends watched with an all-absorbing interest, though to Blueskin it was perfectly intelligible.

He could tell that Ross, the landlord, was doing much more in his and their behalf than ever he would have expected.

In fact, cautious as the landlord was, and having so much dread of the thief-taker as he knew him to have, he could scarcely believe that he was not making some mistake.

But no, there was Wild, and there were his men, all looking as merry as they well could, and about as oblivious of prudence as it was possible for them to be.

Yet Ross had never given Blueskin the least sign that things were progressing favourably for him. Perhaps the reason was that he should be seen, and that he did not wish to have all his trouble for nothing.

Suddenly, however, one of the janizaries doubled up into a curious heap and slipped under the table.

But, such was the state of excitement in which all his companions were, the circumstance was unnoticed, except by those who were seated next, and all they did was to laugh.

After the lapse of a moment, another of the bull-dogs, as Jonathan loved to call them, doubled up and disappeared in precisely the same manner.

He was followed by another and another, and with increasing rapidity.

The reader, doubtless, already suspects what had taken place, and, therefore, there is no reason for us to keep it a secret any longer.

Ross was a man who possessed one of those dispositions which can never forget a kindness.

Now, although a long time had elapsed since Blueskin had performed the service to which we have alluded, still—

His memory was green,

and he resolved, no matter how much he might personally inconvenience himself, to requite the favour.

Accordingly, then, when he had made up his mind to this, he determined to induce Jonathan, by some means or other, to remain for a time at the inn.

We have seen how cleverly he took advantage of all the circumstances which would enable him to do so, and how, without Jonathan being aware of it, he had contrived to supply them with ale, and then to keep them still longer by serving up the meat.

The ale was drugged.

Not one pot was brought in that did not have some addition made to it by the landlord.

And this did not alter the taste of the ale—on the contrary, it seemed to improve its flavour, giving it a richness and creaminess, if we may so speak.

We are not afraid to say that there are plenty of publicans who know very well what it was that Ross put into the ale.

It was a decoction of berries, used to impart an intoxicating quality to whatever it was added to.

A certain quantity always found its way into the casks of old October ale, and all the landlord did was to add a little more in each tankard.

Its effects were not sudden, but gradual and unconscious.

It stole upon them unawares.

And so the janizaries, as the fumes rose up into their brains, felt themselves deprived of sense and strength, and their bodies collapsing in the manner we have described, they fell under the table.

At length, Jonathan Wild, who seemed to withstand the power of the drug much better than his men, became aware that they were one after another falling off their seats in a state of helpless drunkenness.

This was a condition of things that would never answer.

Uttering a terrible imprecation, he sprang to his feet.

But his excitement and motion appeared to accelerate its effect upon him, for his legs suddenly gave way beneath him.

He felt himself going—felt that he was growing overpowered, and made a frantic effort to recover himself.

But in vain.

He clutched at the edge of the table, but it slipped from his grasp, and he fell as helpless and insensible as a log of wood upon the floor.

None of his janizaries remained to follow his example.

They were all down.

Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess viewed this scene with the greatest astonishment, and were scarcely able to understand it.

Blueskin, however, knew all.

As soon as he saw that it was prudent for him to do so, Ross approached them.

"Mr. Blake," he said, "I have acquitted myself of the obligation I was under to you. You are free."

"You have acquitted it nobly," replied Blueskin, "though, I am afraid, at great cost to yourself."

"Never mind that now. Quick. You cannot be too quick, for there is no knowing how soon Jonathan may recover, and make your escape difficult, if not doubtful."

"You must release us, Ross. We are powerless to help ourselves."

"Are you handcuffed?"

"Yes."

"Then I must get some keys. Stop a moment."

"Don't be any longer than you can help."

"Rely upon me, Mr. Blake."

As he spoke, the landlord hastened towards the prostrate body of Wild, and, feeling in his pockets, soon found a bunch of keys, which he doubted not would release the three prisoners from their disagreeable thralldom.

And in this anticipation he was not disappointed, and our friends, to their unspeakable satisfaction, found their arms and hands at liberty.

"Now," said Ross, "don't stop to talk to each other, but follow me as quickly as you are able. The storm is quite over, and you have a good chance of making your escape."

"But the horses from Tumposki's?" said Blueskin, "some fatality seems to attend them. I suppose the storm which had the effect of detaining Wild here will also have kept them away; so what are we to do for horses in our flight?"

"Surely you forget Jonathan Wild's?"

"Oh! ah! yes, he came here on horseback, and so did all his men."

"Of course they did."

"And where are the horses?"

"All in the stable, and you can have a good pick out of them. Take the three best."

"Ross, you have indeed saved us."

"I have tried to do so."

"But, my friend, when Jonathan recovers, what shall you do? His anger will be terrible, and your life will not be safe at his hands."

"I will get out of his way, never fear."

"Do so, for it would grieve me much if any harm happened to you. But do not think that I shall allow you to be a loser by this night's work. You have saved us, but it has been at the cost of your own ruin. However, we set a high value on the possession of our lives and liberty, and you shall have it."

"I want no reward, Mr. Blake. What I have done I consider was purely my duty, and there the matter rests."

"Not so. I know you will not refuse to receive some compensation for the loss you have already and may

futurely sustain. Meet me two days hence in Westminster Abbey, and you shall receive a reward for what you have done."

"Many thanks. I am a struggling man, and do not feel ashamed to confess that just now money is of especial value to me, and that I should be very thankful for your bounty."

"Do not call it bounty, because it is not. It is rather the repayment of a service you have done us, of the worth of which we could make no estimate."

"What time shall I meet you?"

"At the hour of midnight two days hence I will be in the recess known as Poet's-corner. When you come, whistle chirpingly, and you will speedily perceive me make my appearance."

"I will do so, and once again I offer you my thanks."

"Nay—nay. The thanks are due, not from you to us, but from us to you; for had it not been for your exertions in our favour we should by this time have been wholly in the power of the villain Wild."

While this little conversation went forward, the landlord and our three friends made their way out of the kitchen, in which the thief-taker and his band lay in such a state of helplessness, and emerged into the yard at the back of the inn.

By this time all traces of the storm had gone.

The rain had ceased to fall, and the clouds had vanished, leaving the sky a pure bright blue, studded with brilliant stars, and the moon shining resplendently.

Crossing the yard, the landlord led them to the stables in which Wild's horses had been placed.

Their trappings had not been removed.

Three of the best were selected, and let out with all convenient speed.

Then a fresh difficulty presented itself, and one that had been entirely overlooked.

It was this.

Edgworth Bess could not ride without a side-saddle.

Now, as the reader must be aware, none of Wild's horses were likely to be thus provided.

But Ross relieved them from this difficulty by finding a saddle which belonged to him, and which he substituted with all speed for the one the horse had previously worn.

This done, the three friends mounted, and set off at full speed along the high-road.

Ross watched them for some little distance, until at length their forms became undistinguishable in the gloom, and then turned his attention to a consideration of his own safety.

He knew well enough that he should have small mercy to expect from the thief-taker when he recovered from his stupor, because he would know, of course, just how he had been treated.

"I must fly," said the landlord, at length; "it won't do to stay here. I must fly, but first I must make known my intention to those within."

Accordingly, after having come to this determination, he re-entered the inn, and, calling his two daughters aside, made them acquainted with his intentions to abscond for a little while, and gave them express injunctions not to let Wild know anything, but to leave him to take his own course when he awoke.

This done, Ross made free with one of the thief-taker's horses himself, and rode off to stay with a friend of his who lived at a distant quarter of the town, and where he knew he could remain for a time in perfect security.

Leaving him to carry out his intention, and leaving the three fugitives to make the best use they could of the time before them, we will return to the inn, and relate what took place upon the awakening of Jonathan Wild.

The drug was a powerful one, besides which a large quantity of ale had been drank, and, as a liberal quantity had been placed in each tankard, the men were very far gone in insensibility.

It is strange that Wild should have allowed himself to be made the victim of such a trick.

One would have thought the great thief-taker would not have been so easily over-reached.

But the fact was, he was so elated with the thought that he had at length succeeded in taking all three of our friends into custody that he, to a very great extent forgot his usual caution.

And then the behaviour of Ross, the landlord, was a piece of finished acting.

Not for one moment did he allow it to be seen that he wished Jonathan to stay.

If he had, and if he had been clumsy in the least, then Wild's suspicions would have been fully aroused.

But as it was, he had spoken and acted so naturally that Wild was completely deceived by it, and never dreamt that all that was done was the result of preconcertion.

And so he fell blindly enough into the snare which had been laid for him.

He drank the drugged ale himself, without being aware of any peculiarity in the taste of it.

So did his men.

It was just about dawn when one of the janizaries opened his eyes, and began to show other symptoms of returning consciousness.

And as they one by one dropped off into their lethargic slumber, so did they awake from it.

There were some who felt its effects lingering about their brains rather longer than the rest, but then they had perhaps partaken of more than their proper share.

At length Jonathan Wild himself awoke.

He glared at first in a confused fashion round him.

Then he struggled to his feet.

The fire had quite burned out, and so had the candles in the sconces along the walls.

A dim misty light alone found its way in.

But when Jonathan found what had taken place, he gave utterance to one of his most ferocious howls.

Whatever members of his band had not recovered themselves were thoroughly aroused by that sound.

They all started to their feet.

"The prisoners!" yelled Wild, "the prisoners! Where are they?"

The janizaries glared round them with the utmost dismay.

The prisoners were not to be seen.

"We have been drugged," said the thief-taker.

"Drugged by the landlord of this infernal public-house, and the prisoners cajoled away. Quick! up, every one of you."

As he spoke, Jonathan Wild made a rush into the bar, which he found vacant.

He could not very well blame any of his men for what had happened, for he was as bad himself as they were.

But that little circumstance only served to increase his ill-humour.

He was resolved, however, to lose no more time than he could help, but to at once set forward on the trail.

Those he sought, and who he had allowed to slip through his fingers when he thought he had them so tight in his grasp, were doubtless a long way off by now.

But he by no means despaired of finding them.

First, however, he felt he had a score to settle with the landlord.

But he was nowhere to be found.

Jonathan, however, was not to be thus balked of his revenge.

Another circumstance occurred, too, which still further served to exasperate him.

One of the men who had been sent to the stables, came back with the disagreeable intelligence that four of the horses were missing.

Jonathan was now utterly furious.

He set the example of smashing everything brittle he could lay his hands upon, and his men assisted him until the havoc made was really dreadful to witness.

Then, mounting one of the steeds, the others did likewise—the horses having to take it in turns to carry double.

In this way he renewed the chase.

CHAPTER CCLVII.

THE FUGITIVES MAKE A STAY AT THE "COACH AND HORSES," ISLEWORTH.

THE three fugitives were not long in finding, after they left the inn, that the three horses they had taken, belonging to Jonathan Wild, were really of first-rate quality.

They got over the ground rapidly, in spite of its disagreeable character, and Bess preserved her seat much better than her two preservers could have hoped.

There was no apparent need for them to make the haste they did, but they knew the character of their dreadful

enemy, and that it would be their best policy to put as much ground between themselves and him as they could before he recovered his senses.

But in order not to knock the horses up too soon, they allowed their gallop to subside into a trot, which, nevertheless, took them along at a tolerable rate.

It afforded them, too, the opportunity of speech.

Jack Sheppard was the first to avail himself of it.

"All this seems like a dream to me," he said. "I can scarcely believe that we have actually been all three in Jonathan Wild's hands, and that we have got out of them so soon."

"It is a fact, notwithstanding," replied Blueskin; "but you may make sure of this, that if Ross had not chosen to stand our friend in the way he did, we should by this time be safe in the cells below Wild's house in Newgate-street."

"I suppose we should."

"It's quite certain. Now, Jack, you heard what kind of a promise I made to Ross."

"Yes."

"I did not consult you about it before I spoke, because I thought as time was so pressing there was no need for me to do so."

"You were quite right."

"I am glad to have your consent. We could not properly estimate the value of the service he has done us, and you may depend Jonathan will make him suffer rather severely for it. Don't you think he will?"

"I don't think anything at all about it."

"You mean you are quite sure."

"Yes."

"Well then, I conceive that the least we could do would be to make him what compensation lies in our power."

"I am quite of that opinion."

"And so am I," said Edgworth Bess; "and should have mentioned it myself if you had not proposed it."

"I am very much pleased to find we are all so unanimous upon this subject," replied Blueskin. "You heard what I said to him?"

"Yes."

"I promised to be in two nights' time at Poet's-corner, Westminster Abbey, where I would give him some compensation for what he had done for us."

"Just so. What do you propose next?"

"I can hardly tell you. There is one thing that troubles me very much."

"What is that?"

"Why, Jonathan Wild being so upon our track. How did he know we were staying at the inn?"

"There I am as much at fault as yourself."

"It is an embarrassing circumstance, is it not?"

"Very."

"I don't think the meeting was a chance one."

"Nor do I; for if you will recollect he was in the act of drawing up before the inn when he unfortunately saw us."

"I am afraid we shall learn little by speculating upon the matter. What makes me uneasy is, I cannot divest myself of the idea that Jonathan have some means of ascertaining where we are and what we are about, which we are in ignorance of."

"I am afraid so, too," replied Jack.

"When—oh! when," exclaimed Edgworth Bess, "will his persecutions cease?"

"You may depend not until he either obtains the object of his desires, or is utterly defeated."

"Alas! that we should have to wage such a battle!"

"We are compelled to do so in our own defence."

"Nay," replied Edgworth Bess, "you must not seek to delude me with that idea. I know perfectly well that Jonathan's enmity to you is caused solely by your championship of myself and my cause, and I am also conscious that I alone am the cause of all that you have suffered since you knew me."

"I don't pretend to deny," replied Blueskin, "that a great portion of Wild's enmity proceeds from the cause you have referred to, but that it does wholly, I must beg leave to deny."

"You would fain deny the other if you could."

"Nay—nay. But never mind. We have enlisted ourselves in your service, and we will never quit it until we are laid low by the hand of death, or until you succeed in gaining possession of your rights."

"I shall have much to thank you for if ever that happy time arrives. When it does, I trust I shall be provided

with sufficient means to reward you both as you deserve to be rewarded."

"We wish for no reward," said Jack Sheppard, "and, for my own part, I should accept of none. What I have done has been done willingly and voluntarily."

"I know that, Jack. I know that. But, nevertheless, should the time ever arrive, I know you would not pain me as much as to refuse to accept of what I offered to testify to my gratitude."

"I don't know for that," said Jack.

"Excuse me," remarked Blueskin, "if I call you back from speculating upon the future to our present situation."

"It is full of perils."

"It is, indeed."

"What do you propose?"

"In the first place, that we get as far away as possible."

"But, how for Ross?"

"You must leave me to manage him."

"But how?"

"I have not quite made up my mind."

"Have you any thoughts upon the matter?"

"Yes."

"Let us hear them."

"I should like for us to make our way as far as possible from London, and find you a safe place of shelter."

"Yes."

"And, when that was done, I should set out alone for the spot where we buried the treasure, and dig up a portion of it."

"Well?"

"I should then proceed to keep my appointment with Ross at Poet's-corner, having done which, I should get the other ingots of silver converted into money."

"And all this time, you think of our being safely bestowed somewhere awaiting your return?"

"Yes."

"Then, that will not do."

"Why not?"

"I cannot consent to it."

"But why not?"

"Did you not say just now, that what puzzled you most was that Wild had some means of learning our motions which we knew nothing about?"

"I am afraid that is the case."

"Very well, then, that is an answer to your question."

"Explain yourself more fully."

"We shall be divided, shall we not?"

"Yes."

"And Jonathan will find it out. Then how much easier it will be for him to overpower us when we are apart. No, Blueskin. You may rely upon it, it will not do. Our only chance is to keep close together. If we are once parted, it will be all over with us."

"But, Jack."

"What?"

"Don't you consider that it would be trebling the risk for all three to go to find the treasure?"

"No, I don't."

"You don't consider it would?"

"No, and even if I did, I should not think we ought to separate ourselves for a moment."

"Well I will give in to you."

"I am glad to hear that."

"But I think we shall be running a very great risk, and yet I have a great horror of our parting from each other."

"So have I. United we may do much, but singly, very little, or, I might say, nothing."

"You are right there, and so let us consider the matter so far settled. All that I have proposed to do must be done—the only difference being that you are to be with me instead of my being alone."

"Just so."

"Then, my friends," remarked Blueskin, "we have something else to consider."

"What?"

"In a little while it will be dawn, so it behoves us to look out for a shelter of some sort."

"That is true."

"We have been coming at a good rate from the inn. Have you any idea whereabouts we are, for I confess myself to be completely at fault in that respect."

"You have lost your bearings for some time, I know, but I will soon tell you where we are exactly. I know to a trifle already."

As he spoke, Blueskin raised himself in his stirrups, and, as well as he could, looked about him.

"Where do you make us out to be?" asked Jack, after he had finished his survey.

"Why, about a mile from the village of Isleworth. Do you know it?"

"I have heard of it, I think. It is somewhere near Kew, is it not?"

"Yes. I fancy if we go there we shall stand as good a chance of obtaining shelter during the day as anywhere, and then at night, you know, we must set out upon our voyage in quest of the buried treasure."

"Very well; agreed."

"If we stop at some place not far from the banks of the Thames, we shall be able to go down all the way by boat, which I think will go a long way towards enabling us to elude Wild."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"We should easily be able to hire a wherry that would answer our purpose."

"Oh! no doubt. Do you think we had better push on, in case Wild should be behind us?"

"No, I fancy we are far enough; and, besides, we must not go too far, because of our excursion."

"Very well; I submit implicitly to your judgment in that respect."

"I wonder what Wild will look like when he recovers and finds what has taken place? I would give no trifle to be by and witness his rage."

"It would be awful."

"I trust Ross will be wise enough to get out of the way. If he does not it will go hard with him, for Jonathan's never very particular about what he does."

"And especially when in such a passion as he would be then."

"I can picture him easily—furious with rage, and impotently cursing every one that happens to be around him."

"And he won't be any better tempered when he finds we have taken his three best horses out of the stable."

"He will be more exasperated against us than ever, but I fancy he will have a good deal of trouble in tracing us to our present whereabouts."

At this moment some more unequivocal symptoms of the coming day made themselves apparent in the eastern horizon.

The feeble gray light, however, enabled the three fugitives to see not far in advance of them the chimneys and roof-tops of a village, with its inevitable accompaniments, a church spire and a windmill.

In the distance, too, Richmond Hill could be distinguished.

"Here we are," said Blueskin; "another five minutes and we shall enter the village."

"Do you think we shall find any one up so early as this?"

"I think so. There is a public-house where a coach stops at, and I think we shall very likely be able to find what we want there."

"But won't it be rather hazardous for us to go to a public and much-resorted-to place like that?"

"No half so much so as to take up our quarters at some out of the way inn."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, if we are only careful to keep out of sight, Jonathan Wild, with all his cunning, will never think of looking for us here."

"I begin to understand you."

"He would think we should be afraid to stop there."

"Well, if you will believe me, I think it running a very great risk indeed."

"Pho—pho. You will find that in this apparent danger will lie our safety."

"I trust we shall find it so."

"Come, then, you will see I am right."

"Whereabouts is this inn?"

"Why, about a couple of hundred yards further along the road."

"Is that the sign that I can just see in the distance?"

"No, that is another."

Blueskin was right. The sign which Jack saw belonged

to a public-house, which was, however, closed, and had about it no signs of life whatever.

Going further, however, they came to the "Coach and Horses," which was the sign of the inn of which Blueskin had spoken.

This even was closed, but the gate at the side leading to the stables was open, so, guided by Blueskin, they took their way down it.

The clattering of their horses' hoofs attracted the attention of a man who emerged from the stables.

By his dress he appeared to be an ostler.

He looked at our friends with something like surprise visible upon his countenance.

Doubtless it was seldom that visitors made their appearance so early at the inn.

Blueskin did not give him time to speak, but addressed him.

"Can we stay here for a few hours," he asked, "while we give our cattle a rest? We have travelled all night, and we are so fatigued that we feel disinclined to proceed farther."

"Yes, sir; all right," replied the ostler. "There ain't no one up yet just at present, though they won't be long. However, I will call them and then attend to you."

So saying, the ostler hastened across the yard to the back door of the inn, upon which he executed a vigorous tattoo with his knuckles.

In the meantime, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard alighted from their steeds and assisted Edgworth Bess to dismount.

This the poor girl was glad enough to do, for she was terribly fatigued.

The least exertion seemed to prostrate her, but this was caused by the debility into which she had been thrown by her severe and recent illness.

Nothing but the indomitability of her constitution could have kept her up. If her spirits had once failed, her bodily powers must have at once given way.

When she reached the ground she would have fallen had it not been for the assistance which her two friends afforded her.

The ostler's summons upon the back door was responded to by some one opening it, and the landlord himself immediately appeared upon the threshold.

He had witnessed the early arrival of the travellers from his bed-room window.

CHAPTER CCLVIII.

THE BURIED TREASURE IS RECOVERED, AND BLUESKIN KEEPS HIS APPOINTMENT WITH ROSS, THE LANDLORD.

A FEW words soon set matters all right.

A comfortable apartment and an attendant were provided for Edgworth Bess.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard occupied a chamber between them.

There was nothing particular or suspicious-looking about the three travellers.

They seemed as though they had been on the road all night, and were mud-stained in consequence, but that was all.

The landlord, then, was quite willing to entertain them, and Edgworth Bess had every attention paid to her.

The day was passed at the "Coach and Horses" without the occurrence of any particular incident.

All three rested.

They neither heard nor saw anything of Jonathan Wild, from which they concluded that he had wholly failed in his attempt to get upon their track.

And certainly to do so would require something more than an ordinary sagacity.

And yet Blueskin and Jack, knowing his energetic disposition, were all the time in dread, lest he should suddenly make his appearance.

It seemed as though they were destined to have much trouble, and many a perilous adventure and hair-breadth escape before they succeeded in carrying out their intention of leaving England.

The obstacles which Wild would be able to put in the way of their doing so would be most formidable.

Still they did not despair.

They were encouraged by the success which had hitherto attended their efforts.

At length night came.



[JONATHAN WILD SETS OUT ON HIS SECOND CRUSADE AGAINST JACK SHEPPARD.]

In this position he was perfectly invisible. He must now await the appearance of Ross, the landlord.

Blueskin had an idea that he was on the promised spot somewhat before the time agreed upon, and he listened with considerable impatience for the old abbey clock to peal forth the hour.

But his patience was doomed to experience rather a severe trial.

There was a dense silence round about that spot. Somewhat, even at the present, when the metropolis is such a scene of bustle and confusion, it is about the quietest place in it; but a hundred and fifty years ago, when Blueskin lived, London was comparatively a quiet place, and the vicinity of the old abbey of Westminster especially so.

At that hour of the night it was profoundly still, and that hushed silence which is always perceptible in the interior of sacred edifices seemed to extend its influence beyond the walls.

At length Blueskin's patient waiting and listening were rewarded.

Upon the silent night air there floated, in musical cadences, the chiming of the clock.

Then the hour was struck.

It was twelve.

Scarcely had the reverberations of the last stroke died away, and before the myriad church clocks around had time to reply to their larger brother, than Blueskin's ear caught a hasty step.

But he remained perfectly still, and waited for the signal to be given.

It came almost immediately.

Without further hesitation, Blueskin emerged from his place of concealment.

"Mr. Blake," said a voice in a low tone, which Blueskin had no difficulty in recognising as belonging to Ross, the landlord.

"I am here."

"Thank goodness for that."

"And I have brought with me something, which, though not an adequate reward for the service you have done us, is yet enough to go a long way towards compensating you for the inconvenience you have suffered, and the danger you have incurred."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Blake, but, if you will believe me, I did not look for any reward at your hands. I considered I was under an obligation to you."

"Well, if you was, I can only say that you have repaid it a thousand-fold."

"I don't say but what it will be very acceptable, for I am afraid I shall have to leave the inn in consequence of Jonathan Wild. I have heard that his rage was awful when he awoke and discovered what had taken place, and that he broke and destroyed everything he could lay his hands upon."

"But your daughters escaped all violence, I hope."

"Oh! yes; but, I suspect, only because they took care to keep out of the way. However, Jonathan has sworn a bitter oath that he will be the ruin of me, and, if I must confess the truth, I feel rather uneasy in my mind about it, because he is so celebrated for keeping his word."

"Pho—pho! defy him, Ross—defy him. Nevertheless, hearing this makes me glad to be able to tell you that I have got sufficient here for you to leave the inn and set up in whatever part of the world you think fit until Jonathan is hanged, and then you can come back to London again."

"When Jonathan is hanged?"

"Yes."

"But that's not likely."

"You think not?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"He is a police-officer."

"That you will find will not exempt him from the punishment due to his crimes. Jack Sheppard and myself have sworn to bring him to Tyburn, and mark my words if we do not keep our oath."

"I sincerely hope you will, for if you do you will be rendering society at large an inestimable service."

"Moreover, you must recollect that he is not properly a police-officer, but that he has usurped that title and office."

"I did not know that."

"It is not of much importance that I know of."

"But he has sworn to hang you."

"I know it."

"And excuse me if I say that I think he is most likely to keep his word."

"I know—I know. But we are wasting valuable time in fruitless discourse. Come this way, and I will show you where I have deposited our token of thanks for what you have done for us."

As he spoke, Blueskin moved to lead the way to the corner in which he had deposited the ingots of silver.

But at that moment there came upon his ears the trampling of horses' hoofs, and the murmuring of excited voices.

Then a pistol-shot followed.

"Confound it!" said Blueskin, in an undertone, "can it be possible that Jonathan has dogged us hither? or has he discovered Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess in the boat upon the river? If so, I fear it is all over with them."

CHAPTER CCLIX.

JONATHAN WILD GOES HOME TO HIS HOUSE IN NEWGATE-STREET, AND MEETS WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE.

To preserve the proper sequence of events we must leave Blueskin and Ross, the landlord, in their somewhat perilous situation near Poet's-corner, Westminster Abbey.

We must leave, too, for a little while, Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess in that frail boat upon the Thames, while we retrace our steps and chronicle the proceedings of Jonathan Wild.

Under the influence of the first gust of passion which had come over him upon awaking to the discovery of the dupe he had been made, he had resolved to pursue the fugitives without loss of time, and not to relinquish the search until he had come up with them.

But after a little while when he came to a place where several roads branched off in various directions, he became conscious of the folly of such a determination, and

unwillingly was forced to admit the conviction to his mind that he was too late upon the trail—that the scent had grown cold.

It was a matter of impossibility for any one to say which of those diverging roads had been taken by the fugitives, for they had left behind them no indications of their course whatever.

To be sure, he might be so far favoured by chance or fortune as to hit upon the right route by accident, but that contingency was too remote for him to be able to calculate with any amount of certainty upon it.

Under the present aspect of affairs his best and most rational mode of proceeding would be to return to his house in Newgate-street, and there await the reception of some intelligence from the numberless spies he had posted all over London and for miles around it.

Ere long, he felt certain, the fugitives must be seen by some one of them. Perhaps at that very moment there was one on their track, and if so, all would become easy again.

But to exhaust himself and his horses and his men by a pursuit where he had nothing to direct him, would be impolitic in the extreme.

So he curbed his impatience and anger, which would have been better appeased by scouring the country round, and turning his horse's head towards London, bade his men in a surly voice to follow him.

Thus they were nothing loath to do.

Their heads ached with the effects of the drug, and several of them reeled in such a manner in the saddle that they seemed every moment in danger of falling to the ground.

Wild led the way homewards at a swift pace.

He was capable of much clear thought.

Violent and hot-tempered as he always was when the least thing went wrong with him, he was now in a state of absolute frenzy.

To think that he had so nearly accomplished his desires—that actually all his trouble had been rewarded—that he had then been told enough to let them go, was maddening in the extreme.

Over and over again he cursed himself for heeding the storm; had it rained fire, he ought to have made his way direct to his own home.

In a state of mind that boded ill for any one who crossed him in the least—burning with inward passion—he alighted at his own door.

The obsequious Tonks was there, and, apparently, awaiting his return.

He held the horse, and Jonathan, stamping savagely at every step he took, crossed the pavement and went up the flight of steps leading into the passage.

Tonks seemed to have something or other upon his lips which he wished to say, but the aspect of the thief-taker's countenance dismayed him, and he was silent.

The news he had to communicate was not of the most agreeable description, and he dreaded some personal ill-usage if he spoke.

Quilt Arnold, who was in the lower part of the house, now ascended to the ground-floor, for he had heard his master return.

Like Tonks, he seemed to want to say something, for his visage expressed it.

Indeed, he opened his lips to speak, but he closed them again without emitting a sound.

He had caught a glimpse of the ferocious countenance of the great thief-taker, and he knew in a moment that something had occurred which had put him in a bad temper.

So he judged by that his most prudent course would be to say nothing.

Jonathan himself took no notice of him whatever, except to glare malevolently at him as he passed.

Wild took his way direct to the stairs, which he ascended slowly one after the other until he reached the first landing.

He paused before the door opening into his sitting apartment, and where he generally betook himself when he wished to be quiet.

He turned the handle and entered.

No sooner, however, was the door opened than his nose was assailed with a strong smell of tobacco smoke and hot spirits.

Indeed, the room was quite filled with the former, and

the different objects in it could only be distinguished through a kind of haze.

Before, however, he had time to do more than just notice this, he heard a voice say—

"Hullo, old man. You are back again, are you? Well, cuss me if I didn't think you never meant coming back any more. Don't gasp like that, you remind me of a great porpus opening and shutting his mouth. It's all right, guv'ner. Only me, you know."

This was a most extraordinary speech for any one to make to Jonathan Wild.

Who could it have been daring enough to seat himself in his sanctum, and then address him in such a manner as soon as he came in?

Jonathan Wild knew.

The voice was familiar enough, to his sorrow.

But the expression of the thief-taker's countenance when those words fell upon his ear, and when he recognised the voice which uttered them, was really a picture to see.

In the first shock of surprise he started back.

Then his countenance became livid with rage, and he opened and shut his mouth in the convulsive manner which had seemed to amuse the inmate of the room so much.

It was only for a moment that Jonathan Wild allowed surprise to retain the mastery of him.

With a howl of rage he dashed into the room.

The smoke escaped in large quantities from the open door, and then the person who showed so little regard for the thief-taker became revealed.

By his attitude now it would seem that he had some dread of Jonathan when in one of his mad passions.

He was standing with his back to the wall, and holding before him, in an attitude of defence, the clumsy wooden chair upon which he had been sitting.

He was a youngish-looking man, though it would have been hard for any one to guess his age with precision. Drink and debauchery had left their traces upon his countenance, and made him look much older than he probably was.

He had a rakish, jaunty air, as though he was quite reckless and careless, both of himself and any one else.

When Jonathan dashed in, he, with great coolness, held up the chair in such a manner as to repel any attack which might be made upon him, while he said—

"Now, old man, don't be a fool. Sit down quietly, can't you? and don't behave in that wild animal sort of way. I am going to have a little talk with you, just for old acquaintance' sake; so sit down, I say, and don't be a fool."

"Wretch!" cried Jonathan, struggling with his passion, and endeavouring to speak. "Wretch! have I not forbidden you to enter the house? Begone, or I will call my men, and they shall drive you out with their swords' points!"

"Don't be a fool, guv'ner," said the young man, with provoking coolness. "Don't be a fool, I tell you. Sit down, and listen to reason."

This cool defiance of him, and this indifference to all he did, had an effect upon Wild which would scarcely have been expected.

He was overpowered, and sank down in a chair.

"That's right, old man—that's right. Now I'll join you, and we'll make ourselves comfortable."

As he spoke, the young man put down his chair at the corner of the table opposite to the one near which the thief-taker sat, and slowly settled himself in it.

Then he stretched out his legs as though he was quite at his ease, and as though he considered Jonathan Wild the great the most insignificant creature in existence.

From hints which have been dropped from time to time in this narrative, the reader doubtless conjectures who this young man was.

He was Jonathan Wild's son.

A worthy son of so amiable and exemplary a parent.

Such another pair as they were could not have been found if you had searched all London over.

But somehow Jonathan seemed to have a dread of his son.

His coolness staggered him.

"Come, gov'ner," said this hopeful youth, "don't sit there as though you were ashamed of yourself. Here, try a drop of that."

As he spoke, he pushed across the table a glass partially filled with brandy.

Wild took it, and swallowed the whole at one gulp.

"Now, I should think you're better, old chap. You seemed surprised to see me. Didn't expect to, I daresay. Quite an unlooked-for pleasure. Here's your good luck."

"Have you come here to play the fool?" growled Wild. "Be like a man of sense. Curse you! how could you show your face?"

"Now, don't use hard words, guv'ner; please don't! Why shouldn't I show my face? I know. You allude to that little affair that happened some time back?"

"Little affair!" repeated Wild, angrily. "You nearly ruined me! You carried off all the wealth I possessed."

"Sorry—sorry, of course! But what does it matter now? You have got plenty of money again, so I have come to see you. Ha! ha! I have had a jolly life! You'd never believe how I made the money fly! Egad! I astonished the folks. But it's all gone now, every rap; and I am completely hard up. That's what brings me here to see you, guv'ner."

Jonathan Wild was fast recovering his self-possession.

This unexpected meeting with his villainous son for a time unnerved him.

The cool impudence of the fellow was rich in the extreme.

It was quite clear he did not stand in that awe of the thief-taker that most people did.

In the most nonchalant manner conceivable, he leaned back in the chair, with his feet supported upon a stool, with a glass of brandy in his fingers, which he every now and then raised to his lips.

Jonathan looked at him with contempt.

Then, drawing from his coat-pocket a pistol, he very deliberately cocked it, and, leaning his elbow on the table, took a careful aim at his son.

But that worthy took no notice whatever of the menacing action.

He scarcely troubled to look towards him, but allowed the glass of brandy to occupy nearly the whole of his attention.

"George," said Jonathan, in a voice of suppressed passion, "do you see this pistol?"

"Of course I do, old man."

"Leave the room, then—this house, or I pull the trigger and lodge a bullet in your head."

"Pho—pho! guv'ner; you won't do anything of the sort. Now, do be quiet for a little while, and listen to reason."

"I have listened too often to what you have had to say," replied Jonathan, "as I have since found to my cost. How you could be admitted passes my comprehension, but whoever allowed you entrance shall suffer dearly for it."

"Don't be a fool! Can't you hear? I keep asking you not to be a fool, and instead of paying the least attention, you keep on talking the d—dest rubbish I ever heard!"

Wild ground his teeth with rage.

"You will carry this pleasantry a little too far, my spark, so I caution you in time."

"Have a drop more brandy. I have come here to say something to you, and dam' me if I go away till I have said it."

"Leave this house!" said Wild, again, "or you will suffer for it."

There was a baleful light in the thief-taker's eye as he spoke.

"Johnny," said his son, "I am very sorry we are not good friends. I am sure we ought to be. I could assist you, and you could assist me. I know I had the chance once, but I was a young fool then. I'll tell you what it is, guv'ner; if you will look over the past, I will, and we will go into partnership with each other. What do you say?"

Jonathan Wild laid his pistol down on the table.

Here was what he wanted.

His son had come back.

Not showing many signs of contriteness, but still, he had come back.

Never in all his life had Jonathan stood more in need of such assistance as his son could render him than he did at that moment.

Should he trust him again?

That was the question revolving in his mind when he laid the pistol down upon the table.

It would be running a great risk to take this son of his into his confidence, and yet he felt disposed to do so.

He might have changed somewhat, and with increasing years obtained more sense.

"George," said Wild to his son, and speaking in a calmer tone of voice than he had done hitherto, "you might have been a son to me if you had so chosen. But instead of that, you treated me like a treacherous foe."

"I know all about that, old man."

"And so do I."

"What need is there to say anything about it?"

"When you left me you carried off nearly all my wealth, all that I had accumulated during many years. There was not a guinea of that money which did not cost a drop of blood. You took it, and you left me a penniless and a ruined man."

"But you have made that all right again now, gov'nor. It appears to me we are just the right sort to go into partnership. You to get the money, and me to spend it."

"Bah! If you cannot speak in a more sensible manner respecting business, begone; I want you not. But if, on the other hand, you feel disposed to aid me in the plans I am carrying out, you will be able to have as much money as you can desire."

"That sounds well, governor. I'll aid you, don't be afraid, for I do want money now uncommonly bad."

"But is it possible that you have in so short a time squandered the whole of the large sum of money you absconded with?"

"I believe you. It's a long while ago, recollect, and I have seen a little bit of life since then, I can tell you."

"I hope the lesson, then, has not been thrown away, and that you have profited by it."

"Never mind that just now, governor. If you have got some good things in view, and want some one to help you to carry them out, why, I mean to say you could not find any one more suited to the job than George Wild!"

CHAPTER CXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD HAS A FEW WORDS WITH HIS SON, AND COMES TO AN UNDERSTANDING WITH HIM.

JONATHAN WILD bent upon his son a searching glance as he uttered these words, in order to read him, if possible, to the soul, and ascertain how much reliance was to be placed upon his words.

But the indifferent air assumed by the hopeful youth made this an exceedingly difficult matter, even for the astute Jonathan Wild.

"What guaranty could I have," he said, at length, "that you would act fairly with me? I feel very little inclination to trust you without a security of some kind. How do I know that you will not seize upon the first opportunity you have to serve me the same trick you did before?"

"You must run the risk of that, gov'nor."

"Pho—pho. This foolery will do no good. Be serious for a moment, and let us talk quietly together."

"Well, as you are growing reasonable, I don't mind. Here, fill up your glass, and I will do the same. That's it. Now I am ready to listen."

"Well, then, George, I have some plans on hand which, if they can only be realized, would be sufficient to make the fortunes of ten men."

"Have you really, gov'nor?" said the son, becoming much interested in his parent's conversation.

"I have, but alone my task will be beset with difficulties and dangers. If, however, you understand, I could find some one in whom I could place the most implicit confidence, and who would act precisely as I should myself, I should be spared all this, and the accomplishment of my aims would be comparatively easy."

"Is that a fact, gov'nor?"

"Fact!" repeated Wild; "of course it is."

"Then tip us your flipper, old man, and we will make a bargain of it. I am your man. Why, dam'me, where could you find a better?"

"Do not think I am so anxious to make friends with you, because I am not, and, under any other circumstances than the present, I should refuse to do so."

"Forget the past."

"I willingly would if I could be assured of your good conduct in the future."

"Make your mind quite easy about that. I am wiser than I was, and I can see now that I shall do best by rowing in the same boat with you."

"You would find it so."

"I believe I should. I have had my fling, and I shall be steady enough for the rest of my life. Besides, I have had enough of foreign countries. Give me London before all the world. What do you say, gov'nor?"

"There is no place like it to get on. But look here, George."

"What?"

"The result of one of my schemes, if things turn out according to my wishes, will be that I shall retire from business."

"Oh! what business?"

"The business I have so long carried on."

"Fencing?" (*i. e. receiving stolen goods*).

"Yes."

"But how's that?"

"Well, for one thing, I am getting tired of it."

"I should think so, by this time."

"I am indeed."

"Well?"

"I shall leave the place altogether. Now, George, you have been here before to-day. Don't you think it would be worth something to become my successor?"

"Of course it would."

"Very well, then. I give you the chance."

"Will you make the business over to me?"

"Yes, provided you give me your faithful services, and aid me to the best of your ability in the prosecution of every scheme."

"It's a bargain, gov'nor—it's a bargain."

"You consent?"

"Of course."

"And you will not betray me?"

"Certainly not."

"How far can I trust you?"

"Wholly—entirely."

"I hope I shall be able to do so, George. Ah! it was a thousand pities you went off in the way you did. You see I can't help being distrustful of you. And if you had only kept by me all the time, who could say what we might not have accomplished?"

"Very true. But I consider you have done pretty well as it is."

"I have."

"You admit that?"

"Yes, but what have you done?"

"Nothing."

"Except squander money."

"Ah! just so. I can assure you I have done that, to rights."

"Is it possible, George?" asked Wild again, for the thief-taker himself was very careful of his money, "is it possible that you have spent all?"

"All!"

"Every fraction?"

"Every fraction; and at this present moment I have not the smallest coin in my pocket."

"You must reform," said the thief-taker, relapsing into his usual gloom of mind. "I am afraid to trust you, even now."

"Don't say that, gov'nor. You give me a trial, and if I don't act fair and square, why, I give you leave to pistol me upon the spot."

"Oh! George, could I but feel convinced that I had some one I could trust as well as I could trust myself—if I could only feel assured of that, I should not care."

"You easily might, gov'nor. I don't mean to go on the cross with you any more."

"You have shaken my confidence."

"I know it."

"And confidence once shaken"—

"I know what you mean, old man. Lor' bless you, I haven't scattered your cash without having something taught me in return."

"I suppose not," said Jonathan, bitterly.

"Don't take on."

"Curses!"

"The money is gone. You have made more, and, by what you say, you are about to add considerably to the amount; so what have you to grumble about?"

"Leave that point, George, and listen to me."

"I am all attention, guv'ner."
 "You must understand, then, that I have two main objects which influence my conduct."
 George nodded.
 "I mean there are two objects which I have set my mind upon attaining."
 "What are they?"
 "For one, wealth and rank."
 "Wealth and rank?"
 "Yes."
 "But that's two."
 "I only count it one."
 "Very well, guv'ner, you won't catch me finding fault with your arithmetic. Cut along."
 "I shall grasp wealth and rank at once."
 "Rank! Do you mean title."
 "Yes."
 "The devil! But how are you to get that?"
 "Never mind; that's my business."
 "Very well, guv'ner."
 "In gaining this one object you will not be of much assistance to me, except by devoting yourself to the business here while I am occupied with it."
 "That will suit me very well."
 "Can I trust you?"
 "Now, it's no good your asking that, and it's less good for me to keep replying to it. All I can say is, try me."
 "I have resolved to do so. To give you this one chance of redeeming yourself."
 "That's all I require, guv'ner. From this time forward you will find me everything that you could wish."
 "I trust I shall. You could never know how much I have yearned for you to come back and be a son to me, or indeed for any one that I could trust. But all have deserted me and turned enemies to me, and I am quite alone."
 "Are you, guv'ner? It's enough to draw tears from a workhouse official to hear you, that it is."
 "Pshaw! You are too fond of folly."
 "Not a bit of it, guv'ner. Well, now that we have disposed of one of your motives, which I count two, and in which it seems I am not to render you any assistance, let us hear the other."
 "That you can aid me in."
 "What is it."
 "Revenge!"
 "Oh! how vicious you speak, guv'ner."
 "Revenge! that is my grand motive. I must be revenged."
 "But on who, guv'ner?"
 "Those who have made it the business of their lives to interpose themselves between me and the prosecution of my plans."
 "Who are they?"
 "You shall hear presently."
 "I am quite impatient, guv'ner. I should think they were rather daring chaps to set themselves up against you, eh?"
 "They are fools. George?"
 "Yes, guv'ner?"
 "I have sworn that they shall die at Tyburn."
 "A jolly good way of getting rid of them, I should think."
 "They shall swing."
 "Oh! then you mean to try the old game, eh?"
 "What old game?"
 "Why, you know well enough."
 "But do you?"
 "Of course I do."
 "What is it?"
 "Give false evidence against them before the beaks, and have them cast for death—then scragged at Tyburn."
 "Exactly."
 "It's a good plan."
 "I have ever found it answer except with these."
 "How is it it don't answer with them, guv'ner?"
 "I cannot tell. At various times I have had them in my custody—one has already been tried and sentence passed upon him, but I believe they have the devil to aid them, for they always make their escape."
 "Make their escape?"
 "Yes."
 "I should think that is very easily provided against, guv'ner."

"It is not. I have adopted all the precautions I could think of."
 "And did they fail?"
 "Utterly."
 "I can't make that out, guv'ner."
 "Nor more can I."
 "But I suppose all these little failures only serve to make you still more resolved to have your revenge?"
 "Just so."
 "Well, guv'ner, show me how I can help you, and I am ready to do the best I can."
 "That is enough. You shall know more in good time."
 "But, guv'ner."
 "What?"
 "Just tell me one thing."
 "How many people are included in your revenge?"
 "Two."
 "Only two?"
 "That's all."
 "Well, guv'ner, I wonder at you. Mind you, I don't think half so much of you as I did once."
 "Why not?"
 "To allow yourself to be troubled with two people. Why, they could be got rid of easy enough."
 "You had better try it on."
 "I am quite ready."
 "But one of them, let me tell you, has been twice confined in the strongest cell in Newgate, and so loaded with fetters that he could hardly move. Yet, on both those occasions, he made his escape."
 "Yes, and in defiance of all the precautions taken, and the watch which was kept upon him."
 "You surprise me, guv'ner."
 "They are two men of no common kind, or they would not have stood so long against me as they have."
 "I suppose not."
 "Curse them. Even this night, which has but just passed away, I had them securely in my grasp, but they eluded me."
 "How, guv'ner?"
 "Never mind how. Suffice it they did."
 "And got clear off?"
 "Yes."
 "Leaving no clue behind?"
 "Yes."
 "They must be very clever fellows, guv'ner."
 "They are clever. If they were only on my side instead of being opposed to it, they would be allies well worth having."
 "I daresay it would make a difference to you, guv'ner. But you have not yet told me who they are."
 "I know I have not."
 "But why don't you?"
 "How can I tell how far you may be trusted?"
 "Are you going to bring that up again?"
 "I have had no proofs of your sincerity and trustworthiness as yet."
 "I know you haven't."
 "But I have of your treachery."
 "Now, guv'ner, look here."
 "What?"
 "I am going to make a bargain with you, and I do hope you will keep it."
 "What bargain?"
 "Why, never to rake up old sores. Do you hear?"
 Wild nodded.
 "I have been a d—d fool, I know," continued his son. "I took your money and made off with it when I ought to have stopped with you, but, then, I knew no better. However, that is all past and done for, and it won't happen again. So, guv'ner, just please to let the subject drop, and don't refer to it any more, because it can't do any good."
 "Well, I won't, George. I should be only too glad to forget the past. So we will let that rest, and put it down to one of the follies of youth, eh?"
 "Just as you like, guv'ner."
 "Very well."
 "Have you made up your mind to trust me?"
 Wild hesitated.
 His son perceived it, so he said—
 "Now, old man, just listen to me, and be good enough to condescend to take a few words of advice from me."

"I am listening."

"If you are going to make a confidant of me, don't do it by halves. Tell me all or none."

Wild glared fiercely at the speaker.

"Tell you all?" he said.

"Why not, gov'nor?"

"You know not what you ask?"

"Yes I do, old man. I give you my word to identify myself with your interests—to do everything for you just the same as you would do it yourself. Now, as I undertake to do that, it must stand to sense that for me to be any service to you, I must know all; you must tell me all your plans—in fact, everything. Then, when we are leagued together like that, what is there that we could not accomplish?"

CHAPTER CCL.

JONATHAN WILD RECEIVES UNEXPECTED INTELLIGENCE OF THE FUGITIVES, AND SETS OUT ON HIS SECOND CRUSADE AGAINST THEM.

JONATHAN WILD put his elbows on the table, and resting his chin in the palms of his hands, looked steadfastly in the face of his son.

But that exemplary individual bore the scrutiny without changing countenance in the least.

It is possible that he was quite sincere in all his protestations.

"We could accomplish anything under such favourable circumstances as those you mention," said Jonathan, after a pause.

"That is what I say, too."

"But cannot you see what risk I run in taking you so much into my confidence?"

"I daresay there does seem a risk."

"Then do not wonder that I hesitate."

"You are a cautious old file, gov'nor."

"I have every need of caution."

"But come, what do you say? You had better make good terms with me while I am in the humour to serve you."

"George, you can't mince the matter. You don't come to me first, as you might have come. I have cause to suspect you, and therefore you ought not to wonder at me if I hesitate to take you fully into my confidence. But I will tell you what I will do, and I consider it a very fair arrangement."

"Let us hear it, gov'nor."

"You shall remain with me a little while, making yourself as useful as you can. Do you understand?"

"Yes; go on."

"By your behaviour and general comportment I shall be able to judge you. I shall, indeed, use it as my sole guide. If you go on square, and show yourself worthy to be trusted, then I shall be very glad to trust you."

"Those are fairish terms, gov'nor, and I consent to them."

"You do?"

"I do, and I only hope you will stick to your part of the bargain as well as I shall stick to mine."

"You may depend I shall stick to my part, George, because it would so much advantage me if I could have some one I could trust. It is what I have wanted all along, in order to bring my schemes to a successful issue."

"Well don't grumble gov'nor, for you have now got to your hand just what you require. If, however, you mean to try me first, I have no objection in the world, but mark my words if you don't find me everything you could wish."

"I don't like those who profess too much," said Wild, significantly.

"Nor I, gov'nor. Therefore I say, try."

"I will."

"Give us your hand on that bargain, gov'nor, and we'll have another dram together."

Jonathan held out his hand, which his son took with every appearance of sincerity.

Their glasses were then filled and emptied.

Wild, junior, spoke again.

"Now, gov'nor, as all is so satisfactorily arranged, just tell me what I have got to do next."

"Nothing particular. In the daytime when I am

absent I shall want you to go into the office and do the business there instead of me."

"That's all right, then, for you know very well I understand all about that."

"You have transacted it before."

"And done it well, too, I flatter myself."

"Well, then, that will be the chief of your business."

"Very good, then. I have something to say."

"Say on."

"If I take the office business entirely off your hands, and transact the business perfectly to your satisfaction, shall you be satisfied?"

"Perfectly satisfied."

"If I do nothing else?"

"Yes, if you do nothing else."

"Then, gov'nor, I undertake it, and in return, to show you I know how to be grateful, I'll tell you what I'll do for you in addition."

"What?"

"If you will tell me the names of the two persons who have been such a trouble to you, and who you want to be revenged upon, I'll be after them like a bloodhound, and what's more, I'll have them, or I'll know no rest till I do."

Jonathan looked at the speaker with gleaming eyes.

"Do that," he said, "and then you will indeed prove yourself to be my son. Do that, and what has happened in the past shall never enter my mind again."

"I will do it, gov'nor."

"There is nothing which would give me so much pleasure as that."

"I am glad my offer has pleased you."

"It has pleased me more than any other which you could have made."

"Bravo, gov'nor. You will find it no idle boast. Come, who are they?"

"These two people?"

"Yes, these enemies of yours you would so like to see at Tyburn."

"I shall see them there, sooner or later, do not doubt that."

"You will, I'll promise that, and before you are many days older."

Jonathan looked at his son with admiration.

He fancied he could detect some of his own nature in him.

And so there was.

He inherited all the bad qualities of his father, without any of the good ones.

It may be asked, what good qualities did Jonathan Wild possess?

Not many, certainly, but at any rate, he was better than his son.

That worthily was vindictive and cruel to a degree.

Nothing would have pleased him more than to hunt down some one for the mere fun of the thing.

But when he had got some great end to gain he could devote himself to it heart and soul, and with an energy untiring and almost superhuman.

Tremble, Jack. Tremble, Blueskin. Not only for your own sakes, but also for the sake of the young girl of whom you are the sole protectors and defenders, for an enemy more deadly, more unscrupulous, and more terrible than Jonathan Wild himself is about to be let loose upon your track!

Hitherto it has been a hard, hard struggle to preserve life and liberty so far, but now that the thief-taker has received so powerful an adjunct, we cannot but fear the worst.

We must not, however, forestall the proper current of events, but patiently reveal, with all succinctness possible, the strange incidents which occurred.

Where could they look for such an accession of strength to their cause? Where could they hope to find so powerful an ally as Jonathan Wild had found in the person of his son?

"Who are they?" asked this hopeful individual again.

"Give me some particulars about them, and a full description. Rely upon it they will not trouble you much longer."

Jonathan shook his head.

"You think too lightly of this affair," he said, "by far too lightly. You must not delude yourself with the idea that the accomplishment of their capture is the easiest

matter imaginable. If you fill yourself up with such a notion, you are doomed to certain disappointment."

"Who are they, then?"

"Men of no common kind, or all my previous efforts would not have been unavailing. Do you think I lack experience in these matters? With this solitary exception, have I ever had any difficulty in achieving my desires?"

"I don't know that ever you have had much trouble, guv'ner."

"Very well, then, what does it argue when all my efforts against these have been unavailing? Does it not argue that there is something peculiar connected with them which there never has been with the others? so don't make the mistake of thinking you are going to do easily what I have failed to do."

"I'll have a try, guv'ner, and if I do succeed I shall make you hide your head for shame. But come, it is quite time you told me something about them. Who are they?"

"One, at any rate," replied Wild, "is well known to you."

"Who is he?"

"He was formerly in my service, and I trusted him with everything."

"Now he has turned against you."

"Yes."

"That's infernally awkward, guv'ner."

"It is."

"Does he know much?"

"By far too much for it to be safe for him to live my enemy."

"I see. But who is he?"

"He used to be second to myself, and have charge of all affairs when I happened to be out of the way."

"What, Blueskin?"

"You recollect him, then."

"Is that him?"

"Yes."

Wild junior thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, and gave a low whistle.

"Guv'ner."

"What?"

"After trusting Blueskin with all your secrets in the way you did, you ought to have kept in with him."

"But, how if I couldn't?"

"Why, of course, if you couldn't you couldn't."

"Then I couldn't. I know what policy is as well as most people."

"I daresay you do, guv'ner, but it makes things very awkward that does, and, besides, I know what Blueskin is before to-day. He is all very well for a friend, but a devil for an enemy."

"You are right. Well that is one of the foes I have to contend with, and whose destruction I have sworn to accomplish."

"Well, one comfort you have told me the worst first."

"Don't you make too sure of that."

"The other couldn't be worse than Blueskin, let him be whom he will."

"Wait till you know."

"Who is he?"

"His name will not be familiar to you. I don't suppose you have ever heard it before."

"Let us hear it behind, then."

"Jack Sheppard."

"Is that his name?"

"Yes."

"What of him?"

"He is the most daring and desperate fellow that ever existed. He has been twice confined in Newgate, and has twice broken out."

"You have got two desperate chaps to deal with, I see."

"I have. I tell you, all that I have tried against them has utterly failed."

"I will try what I can do, guv'ner. You won't daunt me. See if I don't prove a match for them."

"When once those two fellows are out of the way, all the rest that I have to do will be done readily enough, but, while they remain, I shall have no end of difficulty in my path."

"They must be removed, then, if that is the case."

"I must also tell you, George, that they have with them a young girl."

"A young girl?"

"Yes."

"What about her?"

"It is virtually essential to my plans that I should get possession of her."

"And they refuse?"

"Yes."

"Does the girl refuse?"

"Yes."

"Guv'ner, you are playing some deep, artful game, but I shall find it all out."

"You shall know all in good time."

"And what is this girl?"

"That doesn't matter. She is with Jack Sheppard and Blueskin."

"Yes. What's her name?"

"Her name?"

"Yes."

"Her name is—is—Edgworth Bess."

"Oh! Edgworth Bess, is it?"

"Yes."

"That's a rummy name, guv'ner. What do you want the girl for?"

"Never mind at present."

"Oh! very well. Now, then, when do you think of setting off in pursuit of these three. Have you any idea where they are?"

"At this present moment I have no idea whatever where they are."

"How's that?"

"But in a little while I expect to receive some intelligence."

"From whom?"

"I have spies in all parts of London, and as soon as the three are seen by any one of them, I shall be at once communicated with."

"Oh! that's it."

"Then, when I know with certainty where they are, I—"

At this moment there came a faint tapping at the door of the room.

"Come in!" roared Wild.

Wilkinson entered.

"If you please, sir"—

"What, villain?"

"A man has brought this for you."

Jonathan held out his hand.

Wilkinson put into it a dirty piece of card.

It seemed by its appearance to be an ordinary playing card.

And such, indeed, it was.

It was one out of a pack, and on its centre was painted a diamond.

It was the ace of diamonds.

Jonathan understood the sign.

It was that which was given by any one of his spies.

It signified that one had called, and that he had intelligence to communicate.

"Is the man downstairs who brought this, Wilkinson?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Then go and fetch him up here to me."

As soon as the door was closed, Wild junior said—

"What does all that mean, guv'ner?"

"It means that I shall shortly learn something of the three persons I was speaking about."

"So much the better," said George, rubbing his hands together.

"He is one of the spies I have posted about, or a messenger from one of them, and we shall learn whereabouts they are, no doubt."

Again came the tapping at the door.

In answer to Wild's command to enter, Wilkinson came in, ushering in rather a rough-looking specimen of humanity.

He touched his forehead in a respectful manner to Wild, and waited to be spoken to.

Jonathan made a sign for Wilkinson to leave the room.

Of course the janizary vanished instantly.

"Now," said the thief-taker, turning to the man, "you have brought this card, have you not?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Then just tell your news in as few words as possible."

CHAPTER CCLI.

FORTUNE SEEMS RESOLVED TO BEFRIEND JONATHAN WILD.

THE man, who was not a messenger, but actually one of Wild's spies, twirled his hat round in his hand while he considered into how small a compass he could put his information.

"I have found Ross, the landlord of the public-house," he said.

"Have you?" cried Jonathan, "then he shall pay dearly enough for the way in which he has acted. Where is he?"

"He was walking along the Whitechapel-road, Mr. Wild."

"Well, go on."

"So I followed him, Mr. Wild, and never once lost sight of him."

"Which way did he take?"

"He went westward, and as I expected every minute to house him, I kept at his heels."

"What next?"

"I followed him, Mr. Wild, till he got to Westminster Abbey."

"To Westminster Abbey?"

"Yes, he walked straight on up to Poet's-corner, as though he was going to enter the abbey, but I knew he could not do that, as it was so late, and the place all locked up."

"Well?"

"He went up the narrow turning leading to Poet's-corner, as I told you, and I waited for him to come out again."

"Yes."

"But he didn't seem to come, so I thought, perhaps, he had got an appointment with some one, and was waiting for him to come."

"Very likely. What then?"

"I saw Govus, and told him to take my place watching while I came here to you."

"And that is all you have to communicate?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Then, here's a guinea for you, and go downstairs and tell Quilt Arnold to have a troop ready at the door instantly and a couple of spare horses."

"Yes, Mr. Wild," replied the man, as he withdrew to execute this order.

"What do you make of this news?" inquired his son.

"Who is Ross?"

"He is the landlord of a public-house, and it was through his instrumentality that Blueskin and Jack Sheppard made their last escape."

"I see. Then you think it likely, by keeping in view of Ross, you will come in sight of the others."

"Nothing more probable. You see they would bribe this Ross to aid them, and I daresay this appointment at Westminster Abbey is for the very purpose of giving him the reward."

The reader knows Jonathan was not very far from the real truth in this supposition, but it was a supposition merely.

Still it serves to show what talent he had in forming an idea of what people were likely to do under certain circumstances, and in this lay no small portion of his success.

"If that is the case, then, guv'nor, we ought to be off like lightning, or they will transact their little business, and be off."

"They will."

"I should like to catch them all at one swoop."

"So should I. Arm yourself, and then we will go down."

A few moments were spent, both by Wild and his son, in looking to their weapons, after which, they went downstairs.

They found the troop already at the door, but not quite in readiness to start.

But it was wonderful to see with what expedition things were done in Wild's household.

A stranger would have declared it impossible for men and horses to be ready upon so short a notice—and yet there they were.

Jonathan Wild descended the steps in front of his domicile, followed by his son.

The janizaries, to many of whom George was known, as well as the circumstances connected with his life, looked on with surprise when they saw them apparently on such good terms with each other.

And here we ought to state that, upon the arrival of George Wild, which took place a few hours before Jonathan's return, Tonks, who was on the lock, refused to allow him admittance.

But the behaviour of Wild junior was so outrageous, that in the end they were obliged to allow him to come in, when he took possession of Jonathan's private room in the manner we have described.

When Wild returned, Tonks wished to inform him of what had taken place, but the aspect of the thief-taker's countenance was so terrible that it quite frightened him, and he resolved not to say a word, for fear any unpleasant consequences should fall upon his own head.

Quilt Arnold, too—when Wild passed him in the passage—opened his mouth to communicate the same intelligence, but he closed it without uttering a sound.

And so Jonathan had the full benefit of the little surprise that was in store for him.

A storm was fully expected, but it seemed to have entirely blown over.

But the bull-dogs, as Wild called them, knew better than to take anything more than a passing notice of this circumstance.

Jonathan mounted the horse which had been provided for him.

George Wild got on to another.

By this time the remainder of the troop were in readiness.

Wild turned round and looked at them, then inquired whether all was ready?

He was replied to in the affirmative.

"Forward, then!" he cried. "Make all speed—follow me."

So saying, he plunged his spurs into his horse's sides, and set off at a furious gallop after our three friends, who are now menaced by perils of a terrible description, and worse than all, they were in ignorance of what was impending over them.

They would have no time to prepare.

At the rate they went, it did not take Jonathan Wild and his band very long to reach their destination.

But ere they got to the old abbey, a man darted out from the shadow of the houses, and stood in the middle of the road.

He held up his arms, and called in a loud tone of voice to them to halt.

Jonathan pulled up, and the remainder of the troop came to a standstill.

"Mr. Wild," said the man who had thus arrested the progress of the cavalcade; "is that you, Mr. Wild?"

"Yes," growled Jonathan.

"Have you had news from Kenrick?"

"Yes."

"Then I have more."

"Come here then at once, close to my horse, and tell me quietly."

The man approached.

"I am Govus," he said.

"Well?"

"I was left at Poet's-corner, by Kenrick, to watch for Ross, the landlord, while he came to you."

"Why have you left your post?"

"I put Tomlins there."

"All right."

"I have important news."

"Tell it quickly, then."

"While I was waiting for Ross to come out, and prepared to follow him, I heard footsteps approaching, so I drew back and watched."

"Well?"

"A man approached, who appeared to be very heavily laden with something. He staggered and could hardly support the weight. Noiselessly I crept to him. I knew who it was."

"Who?"

"Blueskin."

"Good. Is he there now?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"We must be off, then."

"Stop a moment, Mr. Wild; he is quite safe; and I



[JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGORTH BESS HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE FROM JONATHAN WILD.]

have something more to tell you which I am sure you will be pleased to hear."

"Be quick, then."

"I will, Mr. Wild."

"Now, then."

"When I saw Blueskin, I thought to myself, Jack Sheppard is somewhere close at hand."

"What did you do?"

"I summoned Tomlins, and left him to keep watch where I was, and then I looked all about me."

"Go on. Why do you keep pausing?"

"In order that I should tell you all straightforwardly and properly."

"Make haste, then."

"I searched all about, until at length I came to the river-side, and there I found a small boat waiting. I looked more carefully, and saw that in that boat were two persons. I crept closer, and heard them talking. One called the other Jack, and he called his companion, who was a female, Edgworth Bess."

"Death and the devil!" cried Wild. "We shall have them all."

"Easy does it, old 'un," cried his son. "Don't be precipitate, or you will spoil all."

Then, turning to the man who had given him such important information, he said—

"Just let us understand this business thoroughly before we go any further."

"What is there you don't understand, sir?"

"Nothing that I know of, but that is just the point I want to ascertain, because, if we set about what we have to do while labouring under a false impression, we shall have all our trouble for nothing, and, it appears to me, we shall never have a better chance of accomplishing our purpose than we have now."

From this speech it will be seen that Jonathan Wild's son had all his wits about him, and, however much he might be disposed to trifle, yet, when the hour of action came, he was cool, and took into calculation all possible contingencies.

To start upon their errand with any misapprehension of the information they had received would be to ruin all.

Therefore, George Wild determined not to go an inch further until all was straightforward and clear in his mind.

The man prepared to reply to his questions, and George interrogated him as follows, Jonathan, of course, paying the utmost attention, and quite delighted with the manner in which his son was setting about that business which hitherto he, with all his cunning and finesse, had not been able to accomplish.

"You say Ross was watched into Poet's-corner by one of your companions?"

"Yes."

"And he called you and told you so, giving you instructions to take his place, and keep careful watch, while he went to apprise Mr. Wild of what had occurred?"

"That's it, sir."

"Well, then, you say that while you were watching and keeping guard you heard some one approaching?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you recognised that person as Blueskin?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he took the same route as Ross had done?"

"Just the same, sir; that is, up the dark narrow kind of passage between the walls of the Abbey, which leads to the door opening into Poet's-corner."

"Just so; that part of your information is very precise indeed. I will assume they are there still."

"They cannot have gone without Tomlins seeing them, and, if he had, he would soon have despatched a messenger with intelligence to that effect."

"Very good. You say the thought occurred to you that if Blueskin was there Jack Sheppard was very close at hand?"

"Just so."

"And after a time—now, please be particular about this—after a time you discovered a boat close to the water's edge, in which were seated two persons, who, you say, were Jack Sheppard and some girl he called Edgworth Bess?"

"That is it, sir."

"Now, guv'ner," said Wild, junior, addressing his father, "there is no doubt about the correctness of the information. I was disposed to think that we had not heard aright, for it seemed too good news to be true."

"It does seem too good to be true."

"But it's all right, guv'ner. You see now I have joined you the tide of fortune will set altogether in your favour."

"I hope it will."

"So do I, guv'ner. But we have already wasted quite as much time as we can afford to spare. We must make up our minds as to what we are to do."

"Do?" asked Wild. "Capture them at once."

"Easy does it, guv'ner—easy does it! You are too rash by far. You must decide before you attempt to do anything, if you wish to be successful in what you undertake. Now you are in a position to decide upon a course of action. What are you going to do?"

"Can you suggest anything?"

"Yes. I should recommend you to make up your mind which of these two bits of game you are going to have."

"Both—both."

"Ah! now, guv'ner, there you are. That's the secret of your having failed to succeed. You let your attention be divided between two objects, and the consequence is you get neither."

Wild looked rather surprised at these increasing proofs of his son's abilities, but the surprise was altogether of a pleasurable character.

He could not shut his eyes to the fact that he was perfectly right.

"Guv'ner," he continued, "if you want to accomplish any difficult thing, you must fix your eyes upon that one thing, and no other. If you don't, failure is certain, of course. Now of these two parties, which would you rather have? Just say, and be quick about it, and then we will go in a body to that place, and it will go hard with us if we do not achieve something."

It was not the easiest matter for Wild to decide this point.

Yet still he felt that if he did not come to a determination quickly he would be like the sportsman in the fable, who, seeing two flocks of birds, was uncertain which to fire at, and in this state of indecision pulled the trigger—of course hitting neither.

Now, for Wild to say which he desired most to wreak his vengeance upon—Blueskin or Jack Sheppard—was almost an impossibility.

But there were one or two things which assisted him to come to a decision.

In the first place, then, he looked upon Blueskin and Ross as being tolerably secure for a little while in the place they had chosen to occupy, and the only outlet to which was guarded by one of his (Wild's) men.

In the second place, Jack Sheppard had with him Edgworth Bess, of whose person Jonathan Wild was above all things desirous to obtain possession.

This last decided him.

"To the river!" he said, "to the river. We will capture Jack Sheppard first, and leave Blueskin till afterwards."

CHAPTER CCLIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS ARE ATTACKED IN THE BOAT BY JONATHAN WILD.

"ALL right, guv'ner," said Wild, junior, with all the coolness imaginable, "but don't make such a rumpus. Easy does it, you know."

"Forward!" said Wild to his janizaries. "Follow me at full speed. And you, Tomlins, lead the way to the spot on the river-bank, close to which you say you saw the boat."

"All right, Mr. Wild. This way, if you please. It is not very far from here, sir."

Jonathan did not deign any reply to this speech, but pulled out a pistol and put it on full cock.

In this way, then, they proceeded to the spot of which the man had spoken.

Of course, the reader having been put in possession of all precedent circumstances, knows well how terribly correct was the information which had just been given.

When we last saw Blueskin and Ross, they were in the narrow passage we have described, and with the tall walls of the Abbey on either side of them; and those of our readers who feel curious enough to visit the spot will see how difficult the task would be to escape if the one narrow outlet was well guarded.

When we last saw Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess they were seated in the frail and heavy-laden vessel just as Wild's spy said they were, awaiting the return of their faithful companion, Blueskin.

With no thought of the danger—the terrible danger with which they were menaced, for they had not seen the dusky, shrinking figure of the spy upon the river's bank—with no suspicion that their arch enemy, Jonathan Wild, was so close upon their track, they spoke to each other upon the many strange occurrences of the past, and speculated upon the future.

Alas! the prospect spread out before them was desolate and drear.

Nowhere could they see the least gleam of hope in the dark clouds which obscured their future.

All was uncertainty.

But Jack, although he felt all this, strove to put as good a face upon the matter as he could, and, though the grounds he had for doing so were slight, yet he cheered and encouraged his companion to the best of his ability, and spared no effort to rouse her drooping spirits.

And he succeeded, though to a partial extent only.

They had heard the old Abbey clock peal forth the hour of midnight, and then they began to look for Blueskin's return, though, of course, they could not tell whether or not he would be kept waiting for Ross, who might have been prevented from reaching the place of assignation at the appointed time.

So, as the time slipped by, they took scarcely any notice of it.

Besides, they were deeply engrossed by their conversation, and did not note the flight of time.

They had been separated from each other for a long time, and many strange events happened to both of them during the interval, as all we have recorded will testify.

During the time they had been re-united, the chances of explanation had been very few indeed, and so they had much—very much to tell each other.

The varied occurrences of the past were all talked over. In the meantime, Jonathan Wild and his men, led onward by the spy, approached the spot where their little vessel rested.

Cautiously and stealthily they all came, treading with the utmost care, so that no sound should reach our friends and give them warning of their approach, the thief-taker and his band crept down to the water's edge.

The same pains were taken, too, to prevent their being seen as there were to prevent their being heard.

They kept close in the shadow of the buildings contiguous to the river, so that their outlines could not be distinguished on the dark background which they formed.

In this way they contrived to creep very close to their victims.

The surface of the Thames was involved in the utmost gloom.

But presently both Jonathan Wild and his son and the other members of the band could perceive a small boat resting on the water, and immediately after could detect two persons seated in it, and hear the murmur of their conversation.

With straining eyes, Jonathan gazed upon this spectacle, and as he gazed he drew nearer, nearer, and nearer still.

It was just at this moment that Edgworth Bess, who had turned to look towards the shore in the hope of seeing Blueskin—it was just at this moment that in a convulsive, agitated manner she clutched hold of Jack by the arm.

Then, with her finger pointed towards the bank, she said, in a low whisper—

"Jack—Jack—"

"What is it?"

"Hush—hush."

"What has alarmed you?"

"Do not speak. Look—look, oh! look in the direction to which I point. What can you see?"

"Nothing."

"Are you sure? I fancied I could see the figures of many men on horseback, looking like shadows in the darkness. Look, can you see them?"

Even while Bess spoke there crept over the surface of the water a faint flush of leaden-coloured light.

It came from the rising moon.

That orb could not, however, be distinguished yet, though a few of her most powerful beams forced a way through the mass of clouds upon the horizon, and it was this which cast the gray beam of light upon the river.

Every moment, too, the light grew brighter.

It was this which enabled Jack to see the objects which the quick eye of Edgworth Bess had discerned.

"By heaven!" he involuntarily exclaimed, "it must be Wild and his myrmidons. It is—it is! They have tracked us even to this spot. Oh! Blueskin; where is Blueskin?"

There could now be no sort of doubt as to the character of the moving, shadowy-looking objects upon the river's bank.

Jack Sheppard was for a moment so much agitated that he knew not what to do.

His companion was no better; indeed, she had cowered down in the boat the moment that she learned her implacable foe was so near.

Jack's agitation proceeded solely from Blueskin's condition.

What should he do?

He had heard no sounds of conflict rise upon the still night air, as he certainly would have done if any encounter between his comrade and Wild had taken place.

The presumption, then, was that they had not attacked Blueskin.

Then, probably knowing nothing of the presence of his foes, he would come down to the river bank, and fall an easy prey into their hands.

But Jack could not see in what way he could aid him; and himself and Edgworth Bess were menaced by a danger of no common description.

His immediate plan would be to see in what way he could avoid it.

In waiting for Blueskin upon the desperate chance of being able to aid him, he might involve poor Edgworth Bess in irretrievable ruin.

These thoughts flashed through his mind with great rapidity, and it was while they did so that his irresolution continued.

But he made up his mind, and, with one vigorous stroke of the oars, he shot the boat out into the stream.

He was able to do this suddenly and quickly, because, while waiting for his comrade, he had been compelled to keep the sculls in his hands and use them slightly, to counteract the effect of the current, for the tide was flowing out rather rapidly, and would soon have drifted him to a considerable distance if he had not taken these precautions to keep himself stationary.

And thus Blueskin was left to his fate, to fight his own battles as best he could.

But then how was Jack to help acting in the way he did?

It was the only chance he had of saving himself and the heiress from capture, and better one perish than all.

But still it was not without a very uncomfortable feeling at his heart that he acted in the manner we have described.

Jonathan Wild observed the sudden movement of the boat, and guessed what had occasioned it.

He had been seen, and they had taken the alarm.

There was now no need for further concealment, and, furious with rage to think that he had had all his trouble of making such a stealthy approach to the water's edge for nothing, he shouted in a loud voice to his men—

"Fire! Curses on you all! fire! Take careful aim. Fire, I say!"

As he spoke, the thief-taker discharged the pistol which he still held in his grasp.

A straggling kind of volley followed from his men, for all had not the weapons in readiness at precisely the moment when he gave the word of command, but they obeyed as soon as they were able.

But Jack was far out of the range of the pistols, and the bullets fell harmlessly into the water.

The next moment he disappeared in the gloom of the river, for the clouds behind which the moon was grew denser and denser, until at length they shut out her light completely, leaving no traces whatever of her presence.

Wild's son was the only one who did not fire.

As soon as the report of the discharge had died away, he said, addressing his father—

"You're a d—d fool, guv'nor; that's what you are. Now I wonder what good it did you to waste such a lot of powder and shot in that sort of way?"

"Pshaw, boy! cease your folly. What could be done?"

"Why, you had a d—d sight better not have done anything than kick up an infernal row like that. Why, you'll spread the alarm all over the place, and not only lose those, but Blueskin also."

"Who says I have lost them?"

"I do. How the devil are we to get at them? Why, if there was a boat all ready for us to jump into—which there isn't—we should have the devil's own job to find them, for they are quite out of sight, and the river's as dark as pitch."

"What do I care for that?" roared Wild, who, after the failure of his design, and the disappointment he felt in consequence, was not exactly in the state of mind to brook these remarks by his son. "I will have them—I have sworn it. A boat—a boat! Find me a boat, and I will not quit it until I have found them."

The men did not wait for any further commands, but seeing the state of fury in which their imperious master was, dispersed themselves up and down the banks of the river in search of a boat.

But nothing of the kind could they find that looked at all as though it would answer their purpose.

"Now, guv'nor," said Wild, junior, who remained quite unruffled during his father's storm of anger, "as I have said to you before, don't be a fool. Just listen for a moment to reason."

"Reason be d—d."

"I know that's what you always say, and that's how it is you don't get on. Reason won't be d—d."

"I didn't mean that."

"The more fool you, then, to say what you don't mean."

But you let your temper get the better of you, guv'ner, that's how it is, and while you do you will never get on. Now, from what I have seen, I don't feel at all surprised that you should have failed in capturing these people as you have."

"Cease your preaching. That will do no good."

"Not now it won't. Now, guv'ner, I am calm and you ain't. Will you just condescend to take my advice in this little matter?"

"What is it?" growled Jonathan.

It was really wonderful to see what an ascendancy George had obtained over the mind of his delightful father.

It was his cool defiance of him that did it.

Who else dared have spoken to the great thief-taker in the manner he just had?

No one.

At all events, not without some hostile demonstration from Jonathan.

But there was George, as unconcerned as possible, and caring no more for him than he did for Quilt Arnold.

The hopeful son proceeded to advise his father.

"You have got spies all over London, don't you say?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then; it's no good you wasting your time in a fruitless search after that boat, because the chances are a thousand to one against you finding it; the best thing you can do is to leave them until you receive some intelligence of their whereabouts, and in the meantime let us hasten to surround Blueskin, and either slay him or take him prisoner."

"No—no!"

"No what?"

"Not slay him! I have sworn an oath he shall die at Tyburn."

"Oh! very well; we will capture him, then, but you must be quick about it, or you may make up your mind he will be off! think what a deal of time we have lost already. Call your men together, do!"

It would seem that Jonathan fully approved of the plan of action chalked out by his son, for he made no further demur, but placing his whistle to his mouth blew a faint blast upon it.

It was, however, loud enough to reach the ears of his men, who at once hastened towards him to hear his commands.

"We can find no boats, if you please, sir," they cried; "at least nothing but lightermen and barges, and they are no good; there is not a wherry to be seen."

"Stop your jaw!" said Wild, junior, "and just wait for orders, will you?"

CHAPTER CCLIV.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON ATTACK BLUESKIN AND ROSS IN THE PASSAGE LEADING TO POET'S-CORNER, WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

THUS rebuked, the men were suddenly silent, and occupied themselves in adjusting their reins so as to be in a condition to give immediate obedience to the orders when they should be given.

From what we have seen of Wild, junior, at present we are rather inclined to pronounce him a better general than his celebrated father.

But, then, we may be mistaken, for, after all, our acquaintance with him has been of a very recent date indeed.

He has said plenty, and shown himself ready enough to give advice and to direct what should or should not be done. But it is not by such things as these that he should be judged and compared with his father, but by his actions.

These we have yet to see.

The men, however, who composed Jonathan Wild's force upon that occasion, looked at each other with surprise and wonder when they saw how completely the command was taken out of his hands and usurped by his son.

And yet it was not exactly that they so much wondered at the son's usurpation, but to think that Jonathan should submit to it with so much tameness as he did.

That puzzled and bewildered them.

They were commanded, then, to follow their two

leaders—if such they could be called—at a gentle pace, and with as much silence as possible, the route taken being that which would lead them to the passage at Poet's-corner.

Upon reaching that spot, the two Wilds looked about them, and quickly discerned the man at his post, who made a signal to them that all was well—that those they sought had not emerged from the passage.

"We had better dismount," said George, in a whisper. Jonathan acquiesced, and waved his hand for the men to follow his example.

Silently they all slid from their horses, and stood like spectres in readiness for action.

"Forward," said Wild, senior. "Rush in and overpower them. There are but two, so you will be easily able to do so. They must not be slain on any account."

Wild, junior, shook his head when he heard these words, as though he thought the orders given were not the best that could be issued under the circumstances.

But he said nothing just then—most probably because the opportunity was not afforded him.

With a sudden dash the men rushed forward up the passage, as though determined to end the matter in the most summary manner possible.

But we will just glance in the meantime at the proceedings of Blueskin.

It will be recollected that where we left him last he was in conversation with Ross, the landlord.

But what he was saying was suddenly interrupted by the trampling of horses' feet, Jonathan Wild's command to his men—which reached his ears only in a hoarse murmur—and then the reports of the pistols which were fired at Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess in the boat.

These sounds at once had the effect of filling his breast with the utmost uneasiness, for he guessed that Jonathan Wild was the cause of them.

He feared, too, that he had discovered the boat and its occupants, and the dread came over his heart that, if he had done so, the position of the fugitives would be a very terrible one indeed.

All would be over with them.

But, as we have already seen, Jack Sheppard and his fair companion escaped from Wild with much greater ease than he could have believed possible.

Blueskin, however, had no means of knowing this.

After the pistols had been fired, he could hear nothing more of a definite character.

How to act he scarcely knew.

It might be—and he thought most likely—the sounds he heard had no connexion with him; for who could know he was there?

If this was the case, it was clearly his best policy to remain just where he was, for by moving he might bring danger upon himself which otherwise he would have avoided.

Still there was the doubt upon his mind, and this doubt might operate fatally either way.

What, then, was he to do?

He drew Ross to the most retired corner of the passage, and addressed him in a whisper.

"Do you think any one has degged your footsteps to this place?"

"No, I think not."

"It is very strange. It may be that what we have just heard, alarming though it seems, in no way concerns us, and yet I cannot divest myself of the idea that, somehow or other, Jonathan Wild has got upon our track."

"Do you really think so?"

"I cannot help doing so. I have about me a most uncomfortable uneasy feeling, and I try in vain to shake it off, because circumstances keep occurring which tend to fix it in my mind."

"What is it?"

"Why, this. Jonathan Wild has some means of which I am quite ignorant, of learning what I am all the time about. In what other way are we to account for his presence at your house, which, ten to one, he has never visited before?"

"He never did visit it."

"Then he must have received information, and that of a very precise character. That is what makes me uneasy, and makes me so full of dread respecting the sounds we have just heard. I fear Jonathan has found out precisely where we are."

"What shall we do?"

"That I know not. Perhaps it will be as well to run the risk of emerging from this place. We cannot make our position much worse, I should think."

"Agreed. I am quite ready to act according to your directions. You must be the better judge of what ought to be done."

"Take up your treasure, then. You will find it a good load. When we leave the passage I shall make my way direct to the boat, and do you turn in the opposite direction, so that if we are pursued our foes will be divided."

"Again I say agreed," Mr. Blake," said Ross, as he began to pick up the ingots of silver from the floor, upon which Blueskin had placed them. "I am much obliged to you," he continued; "more obliged to you than I can well express. You have, indeed, been liberal."

Ross, the landlord, was a stout, strong, hearty man, so he took up the ingots with much less difficulty than Blueskin did, who was greatly enfeebled by the numerous wounds he had received.

As soon as he was ready Blueskin prepared to start.

But they had already lingered too long.

Jonathan Wild had reached the entrance as we have already described, and followed closely by his men, made a sudden rush.

Blueskin comprehended his danger in a moment.

He had all along been haunted by the idea that the thief-taker was upon his track.

Now he was upon him.

His capture seemed certain.

In that narrow passage which had but one outlet, what chance had he of making his escape?

His heart sank within him as the consciousness came over him that he must fall into the hands of the dreaded thief-taker.

Perhaps, he thought, Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess had already been made prisoners, and the treasure which had been obtained with so much risk, been taken from them.

But it was not in Blueskin's nature to submit to any circumstances, let them be ever so adverse, without making at least a desperate effort to preserve his life and liberty.

And so, on the present occasion, actuated by this feeling, he immediately turned and fled up the narrow passage, until the stone walls prevented him going any further.

Then he was forced to stand at bay.

Ross, the landlord (who, burdened with the weight he carried, was less quick in his movements), was immediately borne down by Jonathan Wild's men, and made a prisoner.

The whole of them rushed upon him, for in the darkness it could not be seen who it was.

"A light!" said Wild. "Quick! That ought to have been thought of before. A light."

Those of the janizaries who were not employed in keeping hold of Ross, busied themselves with lighting the dark lanterns with which they were provided.

They had done this too often not to be expeditious and, accordingly, before many seconds had elapsed, the united beams of the lanterns tolerably revealed the character of the place they were in.

Of course the lenses were at once turned upon the prisoner they held so securely in their grasp, and then they recognised him as the landlord who had furnished them with the drugged ale.

Jonathan recognised him, too, and commanded his men to hold him tight.

They obeyed, and directed their master's attention to the ingots of silver which Ross had dropped.

Of course Jonathan recognised them too, and a howl of anger burst from his lips.

In the excitements of the last few days he had almost forgotten the robbery, but now the sight of the well-known ingots brought it back with great vividness to his mind.

Without any positive proof that Blueskin and Jack Sheppard were the robbers, he had judged it to be them, but now he had positive proof.

"Forward," he cried, again. "We have another prisoner to take. Forward."

Flushed and heated with the success they had already met with, the men rushed up the passage.

But they reached the end of it without meeting with an obstruction of any kind.

When they could go no further, with dismay pictured upon their faces, they turned round and looked about them.

No one was to be seen.

By some extraordinary means or other, Blueskin had disappeared.

Wild was furious.

Convinced there was no means of exit, save one—and that one being the passage guarded by his men—he came to the conclusion that Blueskin must have concealed himself in some out of the way nook.

But a hasty, though thorough examination of the place showed there was no such place affording the least capabilities for concealment.

The idea struck him that, somehow or other, Blueskin had been cunning enough to slip out unperceived.

But the men on guard, upon being appealed to, solemnly declared that he had not passed them.

Jonathan was puzzled.

Again and again he made an examination of the place, but without result.

The only thing that looked at all probable was that Blueskin had found some means or other of making his way into the Abbey.

But Jonathan could see none at all practicable.

He knew, too, how carefully all the place was secured, and though there were several windows round about, yet none of them bore the appearance of having been forced open.

"What do you think, George?" Wild asked, when, thoroughly baffled by the mysterious disappearance, he could come to no conclusion himself.

"Don't know, old 'un. It's either one of these two things. If Blueskin has not passed the men at the entrance, he must be inside the Abbey, for it is quite certain he is not hiding anywhere about here."

This was an opinion entirely in accordance with Jonathan's own ideas upon the matter.

"Take care your other prisoner is secured, and let us effect an entrance into the Abbey, and see if we cannot find the other."

"Good," said Wild, senior; "but I hope you see that it is not the easiest matter in the world to capture these fellows."

"You are right, guv'ner."

"Those in the boat, you see, eluded us, and I am sure our approach was silent and cautious enough, but some cursed thing or another gave them the alarm."

"It looks like it."

Wild would not have let slip this opportunity of reminding his son that all was not so easy as he had seemed to think it was for worlds; in fact, he looked upon it with professional pique.

The order was given to keep tight hold of Ross, and then Wild despatched another of his men to call up the man who had charge of the keys of the Abbey—for it was more than even the great thief-taker dare do to break into a sacred edifice upon the mere supposition that a felon, of whom he was in pursuit, had concealed himself there.

Some time was consequently thus lost, and Wild chafed and fretted like an imprisoned tiger.

At length the old man, who had charge of the keys of the sacred building, made his appearance.

At first he demurred, but a diabolical threat, such as Jonathan Wild alone could utter, induced him to alter his mind.

He fitted the key into the lock with a trembling hand, and shot back the bolt.

As soon as the door was fairly open for him to pass through, Jonathan rushed in.

George Wild was next, and, of course, the janizaries were not very far behind, for they knew it was more than their lives were worth to linger.

The lanterns which they carried had been quite sufficient to illuminate the narrow passage, but now they were brought into the area of the vast building, they were found totally inadequate to disperse the mass of darkness with which it was filled.

A dim kind of halo was just cast around Wild and his party, and that was all, and more served to keep any one away from them than it enabled them to perceive any one.

But Wild was not to be daunted by such a thing as defect in the amount of light.

With speed and dexterity he searched all about him, nor did he cease until the whole of the area of Westminster Abbey, vast as it is, had been explored.

The search, however, did not result in their finding anything, not even so much as a trace of the person of whom they were in pursuit.

CHAPTER CCLV.

THE MYSTERY OF BLUESKIN'S EXTRAORDINARY DISAPPEARANCE IS REVEALED TO THE READER.

If the truth must be told, there was no one more chagrined at this complete failure to capture our friends than the thief-taker's son George.

He had spoken so confidently about what he should do, and had, in a manner of speaking, taken the direction of affairs entirely to himself, and, after all, done nothing save capture Ross, the landlord.

A more favourable chance of making them prisoners George considered they would never have, and the probability is, he was quite right.

They were all close together, and yet divided, which made their hopes of succeeding look all the brighter.

And yet, in despite of all this, they had failed, signally failed.

George Wild was so enraged that he could scarcely trust himself to speak, and that is how it is we have heard so little of him lately.

When the Abbey had been searched, Jonathan stood for a moment or two in doubt as to what he should do next.

The evidence of Blueskin being in the Abbey rested upon presumption only.

It might be that he had never entered it, but had managed, somehow or other, to escape.

If, however, Jonathan could have been assured that he really was within the building, he would not have quitted it until he had looked into every crevice.

But in the absence of any such assurance, he was not likely to look so closely.

Still, as we have stated, he explored the whole of the area, not leaving a square foot of it unvisited.

But still to no purpose.

"What do you think now, George?" he asked.

"Think, guv'ner?"

"Yes!"

"Why that they must have the devil himself to aid them."

"Bah!"

"How in the world, then, could he have got out of that passage in the way he has?"

"It puzzles me!"

"And me!"

"Let us go outside and look again—perhaps we may find something."

"Come, then."

With these words the worthy pair left the Abbey and proceeded to the end of the passage.

Looking up they could see nothing but the gray walls of the venerable structure.

"There is a window, guv'ner!" said Wild, junior.

"I see it."

"Could he have got through that?"

"It seems hardly possible!"

"I should not like to try it, guv'ner."

"It has no appearance either of being broken or disturbed. You may depend upon it he has managed to elude the men at the outlet, and has got clear off."

"I am afraid that's it, guv'ner. Curse me, if this isn't the rummiest night's work I have ever had."

"Why so?"

"I would have laid a wager to any amount that we should have had all four prisoners by this time."

Wild laughed.

"You were very confident about what you should do. I said nothing, because I knew you spoke in ignorance; but now you will have a better idea of the kind of people we have got to grapple with."

"Curse it, yes."

"It is a strange thing, George, and it often gives me a great deal of uneasiness, but if I turn against others I can succeed, but with them I have always failed."

"It's a strange disappearance, guv'ner, but now, do you know, I think I can tell you the secret of your unsuccess."

"Can you?"

"Yes. You want your revenge, and"—

"I will have it."

"Don't be savage, guv'ner. I say you want your revenge, and you try to get it, but you are rather too refined in your ideas."

"Refined in my ideas?"

"Yes. I mean refined in your ideas of revenge. Now, if it was me, I should consider my revenge quite accomplished when my foe was dead, no matter how his death was brought about. But you are not content with that."

"I am not."

"You want to capture them alive—to gloat over their sufferings while they are in custody—subject them to the ordeal of a trial, and then have them executed at Tyburn."

"Ha! ha!"

"You laugh."

"I do. I laugh when I think of the coming of that day."

George Wild shook his head.

"Guv'ner, take my advice. If you want to get rid of them, don't wait for the scrapping business, but, the first time you have a chance, put a bullet into them."

"Pho—pho."

"Have your own way."

"George."

"What, guv'ner?"

"Do you know what is always said about Jonathan Wild?"

"Yes; but I shouldn't think you like to hear it."

"I do."

"Do you?"

"And glory in it."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes. It's true what they do say, but I shouldn't like to hear it if it was me."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, everybody says that you are the d—dest villain unhung."

"Ha!"

"Why, you seem as if you didn't like it, after all."

"Do not try my patience too far, George; you will find it a dangerous game to trifle with me."

"Don't you be a fool, guv'ner. I told you what everybody says about you, and it's the truth."

"You go from the point."

"How so?"

"That is not what I meant."

"What did you mean, guv'ner?"

"Why, all who know me say, 'Jonathan Wild is a man who, sooner or later, never fails to keep his word, no matter at what cost or trouble.'"

"Oh! that's what they say, is it?"

"Yes."

"Then it was a slight misunderstanding of mine, that's all, guv'ner."

"Now, I have sworn that Jack Sheppard shall die at Tyburn, and on this spot I renew the oath. Already has he been tried and cast for death, and his execution will soon follow."

"You are an obstinate pig, guv'ner, and it's no good trying to reason with you. But, if you were a sensible man, and this Sheppard stood in the way between you and your designs, you would be content with his death, no matter in what way it was inflicted. But it's no good our standing here like this, because our talk will come to nothing, after all. What are you going to do?"

"I am loath to give in."

"So am I, guv'ner."

"But what can be done?"

"Nothing, that I know of. It's no good our exhausting ourselves uselessly."

"It is not."

"You say you have spies in every part of London, whose especial duty it is to watch for their appearance."

"Yes, and when seen not to lose sight of them, but immediately communicate with me."

"Then let us go back, guv'ner. We can't do any good here. We must wait in patience for a report to come to us, and the next time we must manage things better than this."

"We must," said Jonathan with a grin, for much as he desired the capture of the fugitives, he would have been deeply mortified if his son had been successful when he himself had failed so often.

It was wonderful how much this reconciled him to his defeat.

He did not feel half so furious as one would have expected.

He would not have liked his son to achieve such a triumph over him.

As he had said, the most reasonable thing for them to do was not to waste any more of their time and energies, but return to Newgate-street and wait for some fresh intelligence.

Accordingly, Jonathan gave the order for his men to mount.

As for Ross, he, at least, was a trophy to take back with them.

Jonathan was much enraged with Ross, and there is little doubt the landlord will have to suffer smartly for the service he rendered to our friends.

By the command of the thief-taker his arms were firmly bound behind his back with the sword belts of some of his men, and while in this helpless condition he was lifted on to one of the horses, while a janizary sprang up behind him and took the reins.

It was in this way that Ross was taken to the thief-taker's house in Newgate-street.

Poor Ross! He was quite unable to help himself, and over and over again he cursed his evil fortune.

But it was all to no purpose.

He was obliged to submit.

He was jolted fearfully upon the pommel of the saddle, and he longed for the end of his journey to come, for the horse upon which he sat trotted roughly, and Ross was profoundly ignorant of horsemanship.

Indeed, if it had not been for the janizary putting his arms round his body to hold the reins, and thus retaining him in his seat, he would certainly have fallen to the ground.

Jonathan did not forget the ingots of silver.

He had them carefully counted and then delivered them to his men to be distributed amongst them and thus carried home.

On reaching Newgate-street, the whole troop alighted, and Ross was assisted to the ground.

The treasure was brought into the hall.

Quilt Arnold had not formed part of the expedition.

Indeed, it had become quite an understood thing that when Wild went out on any of his excursions Quilt stayed at home, and had, for the time being, the sole direction of affairs.

It was so in the present instance.

But he was up, and waiting for the thief-taker to make his appearance, so he lost no time in showing himself.

Moreover, Quilt was curious to learn the result of this expedition, for he had learned from the spy what was the object of it.

He was scarcely surprised when he saw the thief-taker return without the prisoners.

But he dreaded some ebullition of violence.

In this he was deceived.

Wild seemed to be in what, for him, was quite an amiable frame of mind.

His first care was his prisoner.

"Take him to the cells, Quilt," said Jonathan, "and keep a sharp eye upon him. Mind you have him secure. I shall hold you responsible for his safe keeping."

Poor Ross, the landlord, looked very rueful and uneasy when he heard these words.

He had a wholesome dread of the great thief-taker, and, up to the present time, it had been the study of his life to avoid coming into collision with him.

Now, however, he had made Jonathan his bitter enemy. And yet we should be doing the man an injustice if, despite the perilous position in which his actions had placed him, he repented what he had done.

To be sure, he could not help feeling very uncomfortable at the thoughts of his position, but he strove to hope for the best.

Quilt Arnold saw him deposited in one of the strongest of the cells, and having done so, removed, at the prisoner's request, the belts which confined his hands behind his back.

He had, at all events, the free use of his limbs, and liberty to range the limits of his cell.

That was better than being chained to the wall.

Dawn was now close at hand, and both Jonathan and his son, feeling sleepy, went upstairs, in the hope of being able to snatch a few hours' repose.

Jonathan Wild went to his room, and, according to his usual custom, flung himself on the outside of the bed with his clothes on.

But his brain was busy, and the silence and darkness of his chamber served to engender thought.

His mind was chiefly occupied in thinking of his son.

He doubted him, and yet wished to place full confidence in him.

Could he but have been assured of his good faith, he felt he should not fear to undertake anything.

But he had a doubt.

Would this delightful son of his be all that he could wish for a little time, and then turn round against him as he did before?

It might be so.

And yet, on the other hand, he might have purchased wisdom with experience, and was now quite sincere in his protestations of repentance, and quite willing to join his father in his nefarious schemes.

But, while this doubt remained, Jonathan felt it would be not only impossible, but impolitic to trust him.

How could he make sure that his son was sincere in his professions?

He determined to try and find a means.

The consequences would be ruinous to him if his son wormed his way into his confidence, became possessed of all his secrets, and then turned the knowledge against him.

"I will test him," muttered Wild, as he tossed restlessly over and over upon his bed. "I will test him, and if he proves unworthy, he shall die. He acted to-night with much of my own old daring and cunning, but, then, it is a fresh thing. I must test him—I must test him."

At the same moment, George Wild, in an adjoining chamber, was thinking of his father.

"What shall I do?" he said. "Shall I join myself to him, and let his interests become identical with mine? I am a good mind to say yes. I might do worse—much worse. I would make up my mind at once to be faithful to him, but, the worst of it is, the gov'nor, with all his cleverness, is the d—dest fool alive."

CHAPTER CCLVI.

SOME VERY EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES BEFAL BLUESKIN IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

No doubt the reader feels curious in no ordinary degree to learn by what means Blueskin had made such an extraordinary and sudden disappearance, and, before we relate the adventures of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess in the treasure-laden wherry on the Thames, we purpose devoting our time to the elucidation of this mystery.

We know he managed to get somewhere where Wild, with all his astuteness, was not able to find him, and he was destined to meet with some rather remarkable adventures before he emerged from the place of his concealment.

When the janizaries rushed forward and pounced upon Ross in the manner we have at length described, Blueskin, although the conviction was about his heart that he could not possibly this time avoid being captured by his powerful foe, rushed forward up the passage, animated solely by the instinct which prompted him to place as great an interval as possible between himself and his enemies, and not with the idea that by so doing he should be able to effect an ultimate escape.

Well enough he knew he was in what, to all intents and purposes, was a mousetrap, since there was but one means of entering and emerging from it.

Upon gaining the end of the narrow passage where the stone walls of the Abbey barred his further progress, Blueskin turned round and armed himself, determined to resist to the last the attack which he every moment expected his foes to make upon him.

In consequence, however, of the want of foresight in

Wild's men in not providing themselves with lights before they made the attack, some little delay took place while the lanterns were lighted and while an examination was made of the prisoner they had in their custody.

This afforded Blueskin time for reflection, and almost mechanically he cast his eyes around him in search of something which would afford him a chance of escape.

"If I could but get inside the Abbey," he said, "I might have a chance. The place is so vast, that it would be no easy task for Wild to find me there. I wonder whether it could be done. I fear not. There is that window, certainly, but what a frightful height it is from the ground, and how should I contrive to reach it? I am afraid there is not time even for me to make the attempt. Yet why not? I cannot possibly make my position worse than it is, let me do what I will, and so here goes for the attempt."

Having made this resolution, which he did very quickly, for the words we have set down glided through his mind rather than were spoken, Blueskin sheathed his hanger, which he had drawn with the firm intention of defending himself with it to the last gasp, and made a desperate rush at the gray walls in order to reach the window, which seemed to him to lead direct into the Abbey.

Had any one asked him whether it was possible to reach that window, he would have answered without hesitation in the negative.

That is to say, under ordinary circumstances, and with ordinary occurrences to influence his exertions.

But when any one is urged onwards by threats of immediate death, it is incredible what a difference takes place.

How the timid hare will fly when pursued by the remorseless grayhound!

With a frantic dash, then, Blueskin sprang up to the projecting gable of the old Abbey, and clung to it with the might of desperation. His fingers were bruised and his nails broken by his endeavours to obtain a hold, but he did not heed that, for he was at last rewarded with a firm grasp upon the stonework.

Then, with an agility which no one scarcely would have looked for him possessing, he continued his exertions, and mounted upwards until he clutched the sill of the window which was to lead him to safety.

Having done this, he almost felt that his troubles were over, though, in reality, he had far from vanquished all the difficulties which interposed themselves between him and entering.

Holding firmly with one hand, although he had scarcely sufficient strength to sustain his own weight, Blueskin, with his other hand, rapidly felt over the leaden framework of the window.

To his joy, he found it was unfastened.

It gave way to the slight pressure which his hand produced in passing over it, and swung open like a door.

Here, indeed, was an incentive to fresh exertion, and the glance which he cast at the proceedings of Wild and his men below made him indeed aware of the urgent necessity there was for him to be expeditious in his movements, if he did not want to have all his trouble for nothing.

Summoning all his remaining strength into one spring, Blueskin raised himself upwards and crawled through the window.

Fortunately there was on the inner side a window-sill of great and unusual width—indeed it was formed of the thickness of the outer wall of the Abbey.

This afforded him a place, then, upon which he could rest.

Gladly enough, then, he sat down, and as quickly and as noiselessly as possible shut the latticed casement and fastened it.

He was just in time, for, peeping through the panes, he saw the men exhibit by their gestures the rage and astonishment which they felt at his unexpected disappearance.

Fain would Blueskin, from the position he now occupied, have continued to watch the proceedings of his enemies, but he felt he must control this desire, since it would expose him to the danger of discovery.

A gleam of light cast upwards at that window from one of the lanterns, might, perhaps, reveal his presence there.

Accordingly he drew back, and sat on the very edge of the window-sill, with his legs dangling into space.

And now a rather serious question presented itself to him.

He was, undoubtedly, some considerable distance from the floor of the building, and how was he to reach it?

He was not even in a position to say how far the ground was beneath him.

Nor to ascertain it.

And yet it would never do for him to remain where he was.

He knew the character of the thief-taker too well to think that he would give up the hope of capturing him without making a thorough search.

Some better place of concealment must be found, and that without delay.

Blueskin always made it a point not to be without the means of procuring a light.

He had too often experienced the utility of this not to be fully impressed with the value of it, and it may safely be affirmed that, unless some unlooked-for accident deprived him of them, he had always the means of procuring a light at his command.

But, on the present occasion, he was unable to avail himself of the means in his possession, because, if he had done so, he would inevitably have betrayed his whereabouts to his foes.

Some other means must be found, and Blueskin's fertile imagination soon lighted upon one.

He put his hand in his pocket, and drew forth a coin.

He could not, in the darkness of the place, see what it was, nor did he care to know.

It was a coin, and that was enough.

He held it out at arm's length, and then carefully released it from his grasp.

Then he waited for the sound which it would make upon reaching the ground.

And by taking notice of the length of time it occupied in falling, he would be able to calculate the distance with sufficient nearness to answer his purpose.

The sound reached his ears almost instantly, which showed the distance to be short—much shorter than he conceived it possible to be.

But there was not one clear, ringing, metallic sound as it struck, but a succession of them, following each other with great rapidity, and each one coming with less distinctness to the listener's ears than the preceding one.

"It is a staircase," gasped Blueskin, and, as he spoke, such a gush of pleasure came over him that he almost lost his seat.

A staircase! What could be more fortunate? It was just the thing. He would be able to reach it without difficulty, and gain the floor of the Abbey easily.

He had yet a chance of escape.

Surely, on that night, fortune befriended Blueskin to no ordinary degree.

Rapidly and cautiously, his heart animated by the hope that he should again baffle his foe, Blueskin lowered himself from the window-sill, and had the satisfaction of finding, when he hung down to the full length of his arms, that the tips of his toes touched the ground.

Fearlessly, then, he released his hold and stood firmly upon the staircase.

The interior of the Abbey was involved in the most impenetrable darkness.

Whether the staircase led up as well as down he could not see, and the only means by which he could satisfy himself upon that point was his sense of feeling.

He soon found, then, that he was not at the top of the staircase, but he was still deprived of the means of knowing whether it went up much higher or where it led.

It was a question as to which would be the likeliest to bring him in safety—to ascend or descend.

He choose the latter.

As he went down, Blueskin soon became aware that the staircase was a spiral one, such as are constructed in towers and other buildings.

As he went down, which he did with considerable rapidity, he noticed that he passed no more windows.

This brought to his recollection the circumstance that when he stood outside, the window through which he had forced an entrance was the nearest to the ground.

"Surely," he thought, "I may venture to light a match and look about me. I do not think there is the least fear of it being seen by those outside. I will run the risk, at all events, for this Abbey is a curious old place, and, being a stranger in it, I ought to be more than usually careful in what I am about."



[BLUESKIN STOPS THE POST-CHAISE.]

Speaking these words, Blueskin paused in his descent, and produced from his coat-pocket the requisites for obtaining a light.

The lucifer-match, so handy and convenient, was not then in existence—it had never been dreamt of.

The materials which Blueskin produced consisted of a bottle of phosphorous and some thin pieces of wood.

With these a silent and tolerably brilliant light could be obtained.

The little match which Blueskin lighted sputtered a moment, and then burnt brightly.

While the flame lasted, he took a good look around him.

He found himself on a circular staircase, neither the top nor the bottom of which was visible.

The stairs were of stone and well worn.

There was scarcely any dust upon them, and from this fact Blueskin argued that they were frequently made use of.

The match quickly burned out.

No 49.—BLUESKIN.

Then he was left in a darkness that seemed ten times greater than it really was.

"Whereabouts am I, I wonder?" asked Blueskin, as, stretching out his arms so that with one hand he could touch the wall and with the other the newel of the staircase, he continued to descend. "I can see no windows and no apertures through which I can penetrate. By going in the dark I may fall into some hideous danger which a light would enable me to avoid. It will be a risk, but I will light one of the wax tapers which I carry in my pocket. The flame will be a tiny one, but it will serve my purpose."

Blueskin stopped again, and though he ran a very great risk by so doing, lighted one of the pieces of wax taper of which he had spoken.

It was about four inches in length, and about the thickness of his little finger.

He was quite right when he said the light would be a tiny one, for such in truth it was.

Still it was quite enough to answer his purpose.

And it had this advantage—it was not so likely to be seen through any crevice by those who were without.

As an extra precaution, however, Blueskin took off his hat, and held it with one hand in such a position over the light that no rays proceeding from it were permitted to fall upon the outer wall—indeed, it cast the majority of them down upon the step just beneath his feet.

Swiftly, then, and with a feeling of greater confidence than he had hitherto had, he re-commenced his descent.

In a few minutes his further progress was barred by a door, which was placed right across the staircase.

A strong-looking door it was, too, and it threatened to put a stop to his going any further in that direction.

But the delight of our friend may be imagined when he found it gave way to a touch.

He passed through it and closed it after him.

He then found himself in a small, square place, with two doors before him—one on his right hand and the other on his left.

He chose the former.

But it was locked.

The lock was, however, on the same side as himself, and of a very clumsy construction, as the locks are in most sacred edifices erected centuries ago.

Such an obstacle as this would not stand long in the way of our friend Blueskin.

After listening, to be confident that all was still, he took a little steel instrument, bent at one end into a hook, from his pocket and inserted it into the keyhole.

The bolt of the lock shot back in a moment with a loud snap

CHAPTER COLVII.

BLUESKIN REACHES THE VAULTS BENEATH WESTMINSTER ABBEY, AND IS THE MEANS OF RENDERING AN IMPORTANT SERVICE.

In reality the snap of the lock did not make much noise, but all Blueskin's senses, and more especially that of hearing, were on the stretch, so that the sound came to his ears in what might be called an exaggerated fashion.

So he shrank back with a look of alarm upon his countenance, and the hand in which he held the little wax taper shook so excessively that it threatened every moment to extinguish it.

But, after the elapse of a few seconds, Blueskin recovered himself.

He had listened intently, but all was profoundly still.

As a measure of prudence, however, he extinguished the taper before he pushed the door open.

He had no idea where it led, nor what results the showing of a light would produce.

Gently, then, he pushed the door a little way open.

It creaked ominously upon its hinges.

Blueskin projected his head through the crevice, and the first glance which he gave around served to show him what place he was in.

Dimly lighted up by the rays of night, which penetrated through the numerous tall windows, were the solemn-looking aisles and arches of the old Abbey.

Blueskin drew in his head, and shut the door.

"There is no luck that way," he said; "I must try the other door. If I go out there, Jonathan will nab me, to a certainty. Ha! what's that?"

A faint sound came through the door, which was not closely shut, to Blueskin's ears.

He projected his head again, and listened.

He knew what the sound was.

Some one was rather roughly turning a key in a lock which was obstinate and would not act.

"Jonathan is on my track," he said; "I must be speedy. I hope the other door will lead me to some place of safety, where I can hide myself from him."

As he spoke, Blueskin closed the door leading into the Abbey, and, by means of the same crooked piece of steel, locked it again, so no suspicions would be aroused if any who knew the door ought to be locked came and tried it; whereas, if he had left it undone, he might have given a good clue to his situation.

Having done this, Blueskin rapidly relighted the taper, and made his way to the door at the bottom of the flight of steps, and which we have mentioned as being upon his left hand.

He cast a light up and down this door, but could see no other fastening upon it save a lock.

He pushed the door, but it was fast.

The services of the picklock were again called into requisition, and, as the lock was of the same make as the other, there was just as little trouble in opening it.

With a great deal of curiosity—for, of course, a great deal depended upon what kind of place it was beyond—Blueskin opened this door.

As he had more than half suspected from the situation of it, it disclosed a continuation of the staircase he had just descended.

"The vaults?" he said. "Yes, this must lead to the vaults beneath the old Abbey. I have heard how vast is their extent, so vast that no man living is acquainted with all the ramifications. Surely, now, all will be well! I shall escape; but how I long to know the fate of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess!"

Blueskin might well feel anxious regarding the fate of his two companions, for their position was one of the greatest peril.

The trampling of feet and the murmur of voices reached Blueskin's ears, sometimes sounding quite close at hand and then afar off, as though the pursuers were dispersing themselves over the building, which was indeed the fact.

This warned him to be quick in selecting his place of concealment, for how could he tell how soon some one might try the door which he had relocked.

Accordingly, he, without hesitation or delay, commenced the descent of the winding flight of steps, first taking care to relock the second door.

The damp, earthy sort of smell which now saluted his nostrils, as well as the sawdust on the steps, confirmed him in his previous supposition that he was going towards the vaults.

An oppressive stillness was around him.

The stillness of the tomb.

No sound from above was now audible, though faint would our friend have heard something to assure him that he was among his fellow-creatures.

As he descended, the dampness of the air became more and more perceptible.

The candle soon began to show signs of it, for it burned with a dim and sickly lustre, and scarcely dispelled the darkness immediately surrounding it.

The stairs, too, became slippery, and Blueskin, in order not to lose his footing, was compelled to keep as tight a hold as he could upon the stonework.

The charnel-house odour increased, and made the air have a damp, sticky, sickening flavour when inhaled into the lungs.

Such things as these, to a man who was flying for his life and seeking some place where he could be safe from the persecutions of his enemy, were minor inconveniences, and therefore Blueskin paid but little attention to them.

At length the bottom of the steps was reached, and then Blueskin held the light as high up above his head as he could, and strove by looking round to ascertain what kind of a place he was in.

He found that he stood in a small rectangular-shaped chamber.

Advancing into the middle of this, he saw before him a door deeply set in an arch, and having the appearance of great strength.

Sawdust was thickly strewn upon the floor of this chamber, and Blueskin, holding the light down, saw the traces of many footsteps, which clearly evidenced that the place had been visited quite recently.

He saw this with alarm, because, although he had done so much, he had by no means reached a place of absolute safety.

Some means must be found of passing through that door, which, doubtless, was in immediate connection with the vaults, of whose existence Blueskin had heard frequent mention made.

This door, then, must be passed through.

He listened, but not the faintest sound, save the hurried beating of his own heart, reached his ears.

The influence exerted upon human beings by darkness is as remarkable as it is universal, and Blueskin, strong-minded though he was, could not shake off the feeling which possessed him.

He did not delay, however, except to listen in the manner we have described.

He then turned the whole of his attention to the door, which was the only one visible.

It was of iron.

The feel and the look of it told him that.

No other fastenings were visible, save a couple of bolts, which were shot into their sockets.

One was near the top and the other near the bottom of the door.

This was awkward.

To pass through this door the bolts must be withdrawn, and when he got on the other side, how were they to be shot into their sockets again?

Had it been a wooden instead of an iron door, Blueskin might perhaps have managed to accomplish the feat.

Now it was out of the question.

The drawn bolts would show at once the route which he had taken.

But he could not hold back for this one untoward circumstance.

He had a hope, too, that he might find fastenings on the other side, or, at least, be able to do something which would obstruct the passage of his enemies through it, even if they were successful in tracking him so far.

The bolts were drawn back and the door opened.

A gloomy-looking passage was disclosed beyond, but its extent could not be ascertained without a much better light than Blueskin could procure.

Boldly enough he crossed the threshold of the mysterious-looking portal, and then, turning round, closed it after him.

There were no fastenings of any kind on the other side. Nor could he see any moveable objects with which he could construct a barricade, and prevent it being opened easily.

He was obliged to leave it just as it was.

But he resolved to push on, for he might be lucky enough to come to some place where he could safely hide himself, or else, better still, find some other means of emerging from the subterranean place.

Animated by this hope, he quickened his pace from a walk to a run, but he was soon compelled to pause, for the little wax taper burned dimmer and dimmer every moment, and the rapid motion threatened its immediate extinguishment.

The whole of the passage was covered with sawdust, so that, as he trod, Blueskin produced no more sound than a spectre.

He was now some considerable distance from the iron door, and he paused to listen.

All was still.

No trampling of feet, no overturning of various objects, no loud shouts, announced the approach of Wild and his men.

Suddenly, however, and just as he was about to move away, a sound arose, which for a moment made him tremble and his blood to rush with a sickening sensation to his heart.

He leaned up against the wall of the passage.

"What was that?" he said. "Oh! what was that? I trust I may never hear that sound again."

There was a scared look upon Blueskin's face as he spoke these words.

The sound which so alarmed him was a groan, or something that sounded like one.

A groan uttered by some person in more than mortal agony, if one might judge from the tone of it.

What could it mean?

Cold beads of perspiration stood upon Blueskin's forehead as he asked the question.

His knees trembled beneath him.

Blueskin was not a coward.

The numberless exploits which, in the course of this narrative, we have seen him perform, will all attest, in the most satisfactory manner, to his courage.

But he was a man, and not exempt from human influence.

The place in which he was exercised a great effect upon his mind.

It was impossible it could be otherwise.

And he was not superstitious.

Far from it.

At a time when superstition was more rife and, consequently more excusable than it is now, he was less tainted with it than many were.

But the solemnity of the vaulted passage beneath Westminster Abbey—

The deep silence which prevailed—

The intense darkness, which the taper he carried only served to exhibit instead of to disperse—

The sickly, clammy feel of the atmosphere in that subterranean region—

All these effects combined conspired to produce in his mind a feeling of dread—of shaking terror.

In the broad open eye of day, had he heard that sound, it would not have had that effect upon him which it did now.

But here the case was different.

Again came the awful sound.

The wax taper trembled in his grasp, and cast odd-looking shadows on the walls.

Had his life depended upon his giving a reply, Blueskin could not have told from what direction the fearful cry proceeded.

It seemed to fill all the dense impure air in the passage, to be borne along by it, and it sounded on all sides of him just alike.

But such a sound!

No imagination, however vivid—no description, however well-penned—could give the least idea of what it was like.

All that could be said was that it was horrible—most horrible.

What could be the meaning of that sound?

Ere now, Blueskin had many a time heard how disembodied spirits roamed the earth, and how strange sounds had been heard and strange sights seen in those receptacles provided for the interment of the dead.

Strange sights seen.

As this recollection occurred to him, he glared with straining, starting eyeballs up and down the passage, and his excited fancy pictured awful forms, which in reality had no existence.

We can scarcely feel surprised at Blueskin's feelings.

A writer to whom the human heart, and all the varying feelings which sway it, were well known, once said that he must indeed be something more or less than a man who could boldly stand forward and proclaim that he was entirely free from all taint of superstition.

We think so too.

Everything was calculated to produce an effect upon Blueskin's mind.

The midnight hour.

The ghostlike passage.

And, in fine, all those appearances which have ever been deemed accessories to such a scene.

Not for one moment did he think that such a sound as that which he now heard, heart-chilling as it was, proceeded from his foes.

In the strange, prolonged, wailing cry, there was such a tone of intense agony as no one could possibly imitate.

It was real.

But he strove to call logic to his aid, and to fancy that it was but his heated imagination which had conjured up the sound that so alarmed him.

Vain hope.

Even as he tried to cheat himself into the belief, he caught himself stretching his sense of hearing to the utmost, waiting for the sound to come again.

But would it do so?

That was the question.

Blueskin listened.

CHAPTER CCLVIII.

BLUESKIN FATHOMS THE MYSTERY OF THE AWFUL CRY WHICH SO ALARMED HIM.

THE horrible groan which had broken in upon the intense silence of that gloomy place, was a sound so awful that it seemed quite impossible for it to be repeated a third time.

It was such a cry as one could conceive some tortured spirit would utter when the dread sentence of everlasting punishment should be pronounced.

Jonathan Wild was forgotten.

The danger with which he might fairly be presumed to be menaced was unheeded.

All his faculties were bent upon that one of listening

for a repetition of the sound which had filled his soul as full of horror

It came.

Aud, though he was waiting for it—expecting it—Blueskin started with surprise.

This last time the cry seemed much louder than before. Still it seemed to float upon the air and to fill the whole of the passage, making it impossible to say from whence it proceeded.

Had not the cry come this third and last time, Blueskin might have succeeded in deluding himself into the belief that what he heard was fancy only.

Now he felt that to be utterly impossible.

The sound was too palpable for him to be mistaken.

But, feeling ashamed of the sensations which had held him so long in bondage, he, with one great effort, forsook the support which the wall afforded him.

He held the wax taper in the air, and looked defiantly around him.

He made an effort to recover himself.

Then spoke.

He addressed himself.

His voice had a peculiar hollow sound.

"What was that?" he asked. "What was that? Surely it was a groan. Such a groan as some one would give who was suffering the direst pain. Who can it be? Let me throw off from my soul all superstitious feelings. It must be some one human like myself. Yet what an awful one. It seemed to fill the air, and to reach my ears from every side alike. What can it mean?"

These words seemed to have some influence upon Blueskin's feelings.

His voice, perhaps, altered in tone as it was, served to reassure him.

Certain it is that, with a firm step and an erect gesture, he walked still further along the passage.

On either side of him were low strong doors.

He was reminded of Newgate.

It looked just like one of the corridors of that gloomy building, with the cells opening from it on either side.

He could have little doubt about where those doors led to.

Not to cells but to family vaults—the receptacles of the wealthy dead.

Did the cry he had heard emanate from some one of those vaulted chambers.

He could scarcely think so.

The doors were small, and composed of iron.

They fitted closely in their frames.

What groan, then, could penetrate through such a barrier?

It was while these thoughts occupied his mind that, for the fourth time, he heard the cry.

But this time he was more composed than he had hitherto been.

He was able to decide upon the spot from which it came.

"Further along the passage," he said. "Further along the passage. I am sure that was where it sounded. Perhaps after all I have deceived myself. It may be the wind coming through some constructed aperture which causes the sound. I must see. If that is so, who can say that that same aperture might not be the means of leading me to freedom."

Having taken this view of the case, Blueskin might be said to have almost entirely shaken off the superstitious notions which oppressed him.

To be sure, he glanced uneasily from side to side as he pursued his way along the passage, but there was nothing more to denote his trepidation.

Five minutes afterwards his progress was arrested by a stone wall.

The passage extended no further in that direction.

He made a narrow examination of this wall in the hope of being able to detect the crevice which he had made up his mind must exist, and which had produced the awful cry.

But nothing of the kind met his ear.

The wall presented one uniform level surface, and nowhere in it could be detected what he had imagined must exist.

This brought back with full force all his old ideas to his mind.

He turned round quickly and placed his back against the wall.

No sound of his pursuers reached his ears, nor had any for a long space of time.

In fact, Jonathan Wild had withdrawn from the Abbey after his unsuccessful search, and was on his way home to Newgate-street.

But of this comfortable piece of news Blueskin was, of course, in ignorance.

"This is foolish of me," he said. "Let me discard from my brain all the ideas which gather there. Let me discard all the superstitious fancies. It may be that in one of these vaults, the doors of which are on either side of me, there may be some unhappy wretch suffering the agonies of premature interment, and it may be from his lips that these awful sounds have come which have so terrified and alarmed me.

This was a very plausible view of the case indeed, and Blueskin felt strengthened and revived by it.

It might, however, turn out to be just as fallacious as his former hypothesis.

"I will ascertain," continued Blueskin, still speaking his thoughts aloud, for he found it a great convenience to do so, "I will ascertain whether I am right. But how am I to do this? Perhaps the cry will not come again."

He listened, as if in the expectation that his words would meet with some kind of response.

But all was still.

"I will walk down the passage," he said, "and knock at all the doors in succession. Then, if there is any inmate in one of them who wishes to emerge, he will do something to attract my attention."

By these words it would seem that Blueskin had regained something like his ordinary composure.

Reason and reflection had dispelled the delusions of his brain.

In pursuance of the determination which he had formed, he took a pistol from his pocket, and grasped it by the barrel, so that he was able to use the butt-end of it as a hammer.

Holding the candle in the other hand, he stepped forward.

Then, upon reaching the first door, he struck three heavy blows upon it.

A sharp metallic sound was produced.

Ere the reverberations had died away, Blueskin applied his ear to the door and listened, so as to be quite sure, should any sound arise, whether or not it came from within.

The necessity of this precaution was soon apparent.

The same cry arose.

It still seemed to float upon the air, and to come from all directions at the same moment.

But having his ears upon the door in the manner we have described, Blueskin was prepared to say with certainty that the sound did not proceed from the interior of that vault, at least.

Being satisfied of this, he proceeded to the next, and went through precisely the same operation with the next.

And so on with the next and the next, until he had gone all down the passage on one side, and reached the door again which led into the rectangular-shaped chamber.

He was baffled yet, but still he was not disposed to give up the search.

He felt if he did that the recollection of what he had heard would be continually present to his mind, and that in daylight he would be utterly ashamed of himself.

He resolved to go up the other side of the passage, knocking at every door.

He did so, and went half-way without meeting with any better success.

Then he paused in doubt.

He had struck three blows.

He fancied he heard a response.

But so faint a one as to make it quite reasonable for him to doubt.

He struck again at the same door, and this time with greater vehemence than on the previous occasion.

A faint voice replied to him.

There could be no doubt about it.

"Some one has been immured alive," he thought.

Holding the light close to the door, he looked down for the fastenings.

His eyes fell upon two bolts.

These he withdrew with nervous haste.

Then he attempted to pull the door open.

But in vain.

It still remained fast.

A closer search now showed him a keyhole, and, before he applied his picklock to it, he bethought himself of an expedient which would set all his doubts at rest.

Restoring his pistol to his pocket, he stooped down and applied his lips to the keyhole.

Then he spoke as follows—

"If there is anyone here in life who wishes to escape, and have uttered such dismal groans to attract attention, let him speak, for a friend is at hand who will lend him all the assistance in his power."

Blueskin had no sooner spoken than, with the utmost speed, he moved his mouth and placed his ear to the keyhole, in order to catch, with as much distinctness as possible, the reply to his words.

It came.

The voice was feeble, but Blueskin could catch the import of the words which were spoken.

"Mercy—mercy!" cried this voice, in gasping, wailing tones. "Have mercy upon me, and save me. Oh! have mercy upon me. Save me—save me from all the horrors of this dreadful place. You shall have gold—gold, if you will only save me."

"Patience," cried Blueskin, putting his mouth to the keyhole again, and speaking in an assuring tone of voice. "Have patience, and I will do my best to help you. I have been chased to this spot by my foes, but I heard your cries, and I will aid you. The door of the vault is strong, and seems well secured, so that I may be some time in making an entrance."

"I will be patient," said the voice; "but, oh! lose no more time than you can possibly help in freeing me from this place. You do not know the horrors of it. Quick, oh! quick."

"Patience."

"I am patient, but the vault is full of noisome reptiles, and I have great trouble in keeping off the rats—they swarm here. They surround me by thousands. I am already bleeding in many places from the wounds which their fangs have inflicted. Quick—oh! quick."

"I will be quick."

There could be no mistaking the tones of genuine horror with which these words were spoken by the living inmate of the tomb.

As Blueskin heard them he felt the blood curdle in his veins, and his breath came short and thick.

But he did not allow these emotions to interfere with his exertions to procure the prisoner's release.

He set about the task forthwith.

The first thing he did was to make a close inspection of the keyhole by means of his wax taper.

He found the lock to be a very good one, but still he did not despair of being able to shoot back the bolt with the picklock.

What he had already that night effected with this little instrument will suffice to show the reader that he was quite an expert in the use of it.

And so he was.

But, then, his expertness was the result of long practice. He inserted the same hooked piece of steel into the lock as he had made use of on former occasions.

The lock, however, appeared to have some intricate mechanism, or there was some peculiarity in its construction, for Blueskin, after repeated trials, could make no impression upon it.

And, during the time which elapsed while Blueskin was thus occupied, the occupant of the vault from time to time gave vent to the most doleful cries and lamentations.

It was in vain that Blueskin exhorted him to be patient, and explained the difficulties he had to contend with in opening the door.

"The rats!" was the shrieking response. "The rats! They grow bolder every moment. I cannot keep them off. They spring upon me in all directions. They tear my flesh. Off—off! I cannot keep them off."

"A little more patience," said Blueskin, who still persevered with the use of the picklock in spite of the frequent defeats. "A little more patience, and then all will be well."

With this small amount of consolation the prisoner had to be content.

Had he possessed at that moment anything else adapted

to unfastening the lock, of course he would have made a trial of it, but he had not.

If the picklock failed utterly, he did not know what he should do.

But he had faith in it, and continued to work on.

He knew that the lock might baffle him to the last moment, and then fly back.

A bullet through the keyhole would, perhaps, have shattered the lock, so much as to make it possible to burst the door open; but Blueskin was afraid to adopt such a means as that, lest the sound should reach his enemies and guide them to the spot.

To his satisfaction, the crooked piece of steel at last caught in the bolt of the lock, and then a sudden twist of the wrist forced it back into its setting.

So far as the lock was concerned, the prisoner was free to emerge from the vault.

Blueskin said as much, and strove to push it open.

But it resisted all his efforts, and remained as immovable as a rock.

CHAPTER CCLIX.

BLUESKIN RESCUES THE STRANGER FROM THE VAULTS, AND HAS A CONTEST WITH THE RATS.

It was a minute or two before Blueskin could think what was the reason the door would not open, now that apparently all the fastenings were removed, and then, with a sudden rush, the idea came across him that the door opened outwardly into the passage, instead of inwardly into the vault, as he had first supposed.

To have this idea and to try whether it was correct seemed simultaneous occurrences, and they were nearly so.

He hooked the piece of steel in the keyhole, and then found that, as he pulled towards him, the door slowly creaked open upon its hinges.

From the impatience which the person who was the inmate of that vault had all along displayed to have the door opened and make his escape, Blueskin quite anticipated that he would make a sudden rush into the passage.

We say "he" because the tones of the voice were decidedly masculine.

But nothing of the sort took place.

All was still.

Not a sound—not a movement came from the interior of the vault.

As soon as he was cognizant of this, Blueskin carried his hand to his forehead, and those strange notions which had first seized upon his brain, when he heard the awful cry, returned with redoubled force.

What if, after all, he had been made the dupe of some horrible spectre, for whom those dark and pestiferous vaults were a congenial residence.

All that he had ever heard from time to time, and all the horrors that his own imagination supplied him with, rushed upon his brain, and, dizzy and sick, he once more leaned against the wall.

But he was aroused from this by a scuffling noise, and now and then a squeak.

Then the truth burst upon him at once.

"What a fool I am to stand here like this. I see it all now, and, owing to my folly, my services may turn out to be unavailing. The poor wretch is exhausted, and has doubtless sunk upon the ground—perhaps he has fainted with the joy of his release from such an awful place. That is the reason of the silence, and now the rats are banqueting upon him, while he is powerless to keep them off!"

As he spoke, Blueskin drew his sword, and rushed into the cell.

A scampering sound followed his appearance.

Then, holding the light above his head, he saw that rats, in countless numbers, were racing over the floor.

It was a large vault into which Blueskin had penetrated.

On all sides of him were coffins placed upon shelves ranged round the walls.

The floor of the vault was thickly covered with sawdust.

But it was not upon these objects that Blueskin's gaze rested.

He took a passing glance at them merely.

His principal attention—indeed, his whole attention was riveted upon the object which lay at his feet.

It was the body of a man.

But so disfigured, so torn, and in such a deplorable condition, that it was only by the looks of the general outline that it could be presumed to be such.

It was dappled in blood, which had soaked into the sawdust all round, and clotted together.

The man lay upon his side, and exhibited not the least traces of life or motion.

The rats, with which the vault appeared to be infested, beat a precipitate retreat as soon as our friend appeared with the light.

There was not one to be seen, though, doubtless, from some secure corner they were watching with their keen, bright eyes the doings of the intruder who had disturbed them from their feast.

Seeing this, Blueskin sheathed his sword, for he did not know when he entered whether he should have to fight a battle with these ferocious creatures.

But for the present they had beaten a retreat.

The little piece of wax taper which had been of such assistance to Blueskin in his explorations was now almost burnt out, so, before he did anything else, he took a new piece from his pocket, and, lighting it, threw the other piece away.

Then he stooped down, and proceeded to render the poor miserable-looking object all the assistance in his power.

An expression of loathing and disgust came over his face as he did so.

The horror of the spectacle before him was almost more than he could bear.

The body was that of a man about fifty years of age.

At least, Blueskin judged him to be so, from the fact that his hair was thin and white, and his face, where it was not clotted with blood, being wrinkled and sallow.

The clothing upon it was of an excellent material, but not such as would be worn by the highest in the land, for, in the times of which we write, a man's rank was tolerably well indicated by his dress.

But it was torn in many places, and from all those places where rents were visible blood was slowly oozing, and soaking into the sawdust.

The hands, too, were dreadfully torn—doubtless in his attempts to ward off the attacks of the rats. In fact, in some places the flesh had been stripped away, and the ghastly bones left bare.

It was a horrible spectacle.

"Is he dead?" asked Blueskin, in a strange, hollow whisper—"is he dead?"

He shrank for a moment from placing his hand upon the man's heart and ascertaining, but he overcame that feeling.

He felt it to be his duty to succour the unfortunate man to the best of his ability.

He would expect it were he in his place, and so our friend nerved himself to his disagreeable task.

If he had forsook him—if he left him to his fate—we should have ceased to feel that respect for him which we do at present.

The moment Blueskin touched the prostrate form, a faint moan came from the blood-stained lips.

"He lives," said Blueskin—"he lives!"

Existence certainly did seem to cling to the pained and emaciated carcass, but that might be a different thing to living.

Blueskin, however, considered it warranted him in taking measures for his recovery to consciousness.

Accordingly he took out a small bottle of rum, and, withdrawing the cork, allowed a considerable quantity to flow into the man's mouth, whom he turned over on his back in order to facilitate its passage down his throat.

The result was rather startling.

The man gasped for breath, and, by the light of the taper, Blueskin could see he was rapidly turning black in the face.

He, therefore, turned him over once more.

This produced a very violent fit of coughing, which Blueskin assisted by banging the unfortunate man upon his back.

But the result of all this was that the man recovered.

His mind wandered, for he only addressed Blueskin in an incoherent manner, and implored for mercy and help,

while he fought numerous battles with legions of imaginary rats.

"He will never get better here," thought Blueskin. "I must get him out into the corridor. The air smells better and fresher than it is here. I must do it."

The task which Blueskin thus set himself was not a very pleasant one.

The appearance of the poor emaciated wretch was horrible to a degree.

Moreover, he was bleeding from many wounds.

But Blueskin did not shrink much.

Before lifting the body up, though, he plentifully sprinkled it with sawdust, of which there was such a plentiful supply on the floor of the vault.

This had the effect, not only of stanching the blood, but also of making the man somewhat more comfortable to handle.

But it added considerably to the grotesque hideousness of his appearance.

Having done this much, Blueskin stuck the piece of taper on the door-post, so that it shed a light partly into the vault, and partly into the corridor beyond. Then, lifting the almost insensible form, he carried it out into the passage.

But it would seem as though the rats had a strong objection to this proceeding on Blueskin's part.

They had submitted quietly enough to all his other movements, having a natural dread of him, but no sooner did he raise the body from the floor, than they every one seemed to be endowed with fresh courage, and they made an attack upon him.

Burdened as he was, Blueskin was unable to repel the assault with anything like effect.

He turned his attention to getting out of the cell as quickly as possible.

But this he found to be no easy matter.

From the floor, from the walls, from the ceiling, from every nook and corner of the place, the rats poured out in countless shoals.

They sprang upon Blueskin with surprising boldness, fastening their claws and fang-like teeth both in his flesh and wearing apparel.

He kicked with his feet, and kept them off as well as he could, but they returned undaunted to the attack.

They sprang, too, upon the unconscious body which Blueskin carried, and here they had their own way, for the unfortunate man could not defend himself in the slightest degree, though now and then a deep and hollow groan would come from his lips.

Blueskin was bewildered.

No doubt the secret of the rats making the attack they did upon him was in consequence of his having put down the light, for, while he held that in his hand, they had not offered to molest him.

Now they sprang at his face and neck, and inflicted sharp wounds upon him.

He made a sudden dash forward to leave the vault, his intention being to place the body on the floor of the passage, and then close the door of the vault quickly, so as to shut as many of the vermin as he could in it.

But, unfortunately for him, while passing through the doorway, he struck against the taper, which he had stuck against the post.

It fell to the ground, and in a moment all was darkness.

A curse came from Blueskin's lips at this unlucky accident, and a scream, which sounded like one of exultation, from the rats, who now renewed their attack with ten times more fierceness than before.

But Blueskin did not lose his presence of mind.

Despite the danger of his situation, he recollected what he had intended to do.

Quickly, then, he placed the body upon the floor of the passage, and, though it was so dark, he caught hold of the door of the vault and swung it shut.

A horrible squeaking arose, for several rats were jammed against the door-post.

Although the wax taper had fallen to the ground, and doubtless by this time was devoured, yet Blueskin had several others in his pocket.

So he produced them quickly, and soon had one lighted.

He drew his sword,

Of course, a great many rats had made their way through the doorway with him, and, rendered desperate by the attack which had been made upon them, no longer

allowed the feeble gleam of the taper to dismay them, but presented a bold front.

One wave, however, of Blueskin's weapon did wonders in the shape of dispersing them.

At last he routed them altogether, and then he renewed his attentions to the wounded man.

The comparatively fresh air which filled the passage—fresh in comparison with the air in the vault—assisted very much to recover him, besides which, the stimulant which Blueskin had so unsparingly administered began to exert its effects.

In a little time he managed to sit up, and support his back against the wall.

Then he partook of some more spirit, and, opening his eyes, looked with an expression of intelligence into the face of his saviour.

He groaned now and then, for he evidently suffered much agony from the rat-bites he had received.

Blueskin could speak from experience as to their painful character.

But he thought not of himself.

He gave his undivided attention to the man he had rescued from the vault.

He every moment got better and better.

Blueskin spoke to him soothingly and cheerfully.

"Recover yourself as much as you can. You are saved."

"Saved?"

"Yes, saved from the vault. Saved from all the horrors of such a death as you were menaced with."

"Oh! Heaven, yes."

"Believe me, all is well."

"All?"

"Yes. I am but a poor fugitive, hunted by the minions of the law, but all that I can do for you I will. I was forced by my foes to seek shelter in this spot, and I heard your groans while hiding. You are saved, and, when you feel well enough to accompany me, I will do my best to lead you from this place."

"A thousand thanks!"

"You speak better than you did."

"Do I?"

"You do, indeed."

"I feel stronger."

"I rejoice to hear it."

"But oh! the anguish which I suffer from my wounds is almost more than I can bear"

"Have patience."

"I have."

"You have escaped by a hair's-breadth the most horrible death you can conceive, that of being eaten up alive."

"By rats?"

"Yes, by rats. I have had a serious battle with them, but in the end proved myself the conqueror. I have beaten them all off. But, come, are you now able to rise?"

"I think so, if you will assist me."

"Come, then."

CHAPTER CCLX.

BLUESKIN AND THE STRANGER ESCAPE FROM WESTMINSTER ABBEY, AND THE FORMER COMMITS A ROBBERY ON THE HIGHWAY.

BLUESKIN assisted his strange companion to his feet.

But it taxed his strength to the utmost to preserve an erect attitude, and he was forced to lean rather heavily upon our friend's arm.

"Take me from this place," he said—"oh, take me from this place! The very atmosphere here is full of horror. Take me from it. For the service you have rendered me you shall be well rewarded."

"I will not refuse your bounty," said Blueskin, "because, to be frank with you, it will be very acceptable to me. Still, I should like you to understand that I did not aid you merely from a calculation of receiving a reward for so doing."

"I know—I know."

"I was hunted to the death, and, as the only resource I had, sought shelter in this venerable pile. I gained a staircase, which led me to these vaults, and while exploring their gloomy recesses I heard a groan; at first I was

terrified and full of fears, but I recovered myself, and—you know the rest."

"I do know the rest, my brave deliverer, and I can never recompense you for what you have done; without your interposition and aid, I should, by this time, have been a mangled corpse."

"Do not think of that. You have asked me to lead you from this place."

"Yes, oh! yes."

"I will try."

"Try?"

"Yes. Did I not tell you I had been hunted here?"

"You did."

"That argues, then, that I am a stranger here, which is just the fact of the case."

"I see."

"But I have reason to think that I have succeeded in throwing them altogether off the scent. Consequently my next proceeding will be to get out of this building."

"And you will let me accompany you?"

"Certainly."

"Then you shall name your own reward."

While speaking, the strangely assorted pair made their way along the passage leading to the bottom of the steps. It will be seen that Blueskin was very frank with this stranger.

But his reason was, he felt exceedingly curious to learn something of the history of this man he had rescued, and he thought candour would beget candour.

The stranger, however, never offered to say a word about himself.

Nor could Blueskin well ask him, considering the manner in which they had become acquainted.

He waited, for he was in hopes that ere long his curiosity would be gratified.

The top of the staircase was reached without the occurrence of any particular incident, the time being occupied in conversation of too unimportant a nature to be put before the reader.

Upon reaching the door leading into the Abbey, Blueskin unlocked it as he had done on the former occasion, and passed through.

They were now in the body of the building.

Morning was close at hand, and through the numerous windows there came faint beams of light, sufficient to enable our friends to see their way without the little wax taper, which he accordingly extinguished.

"We will get out, if we can, at the first door we come to," Blueskin said.

His companion assented.

Like most other places, the doors in Westminster Abbey were secured more against anyone entering than anyone leaving the building.

A lock was all that interposed, and Blueskin, having first reconnoitred through a side window, and ascertained that none of his enemies were about, pushed the bolt of the lock back with so little trouble that his strange companion was scarcely aware of what had been done.

The fresh, cool, morning air blew gratefully upon their faces, and did a great deal towards thoroughly reviving the wounded man.

But he presented a terrible spectacle.

He was covered with sawdust coagulated with blood, or where it was not stained with the ensanguined fluid, the white showed out in all the more horrible contrast.

Blood was flowing, too, from all parts of his body, and his clothing was torn to shreds.

Such was the singular-looking object which emerged with Blueskin into the light of day from the vaults of Westminster Abbey.

The stranger, whoever he might be, was in a most deplorable state of weakness, and Blueskin felt that he should have to support him to whatever place he was going, for he could not have walked unaided.

But how could Blueskin go with him without incurring the utmost danger?

Even at that early hour people would be abroad, and curiosity would be excited the moment they caught sight of the bleeding blood-stained object by the side of which Blueskin walked.

The latter was, of course, in great dread of detection, and was obliged to be exceedingly careful how he showed himself.

And yet Blueskin did not like to mention this

But the stranger thought of it.
 "Did you not tell me," he said, "that you were hunted by the myrmidons of the law?"

"Yes."

"Is it not, then, very injudicious of you to show yourself in broad daylight?"

"It is, very."

"How do you know where the officers are searching for you?"

"I cannot tell."

"I see we must part. I will never consent to bringing you into trouble. You have done me good service, and I am grateful to you for it. I cannot consent to your accompanying me any further. Leave me here; I shall soon get assistance."

"I cannot leave you."

"Why not?"

"You are unfit to be left. But I have a thought."

"A thought?"

"Yes. You doubtless have some place to which you wish to go. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"Then I will hail a hackney-coach, and you can direct the man to drive you wherever you think proper."

"Many thanks."

"Does that arrangement suit you?"

"Admirably."

"Good, then. We have not far to go before we come to a stand for hackney carriages. There we can hire one."

"Thanks; and now, as we go along, I will tell you that which doubtless you are very curious to know. You have not said so, but I guess it. You wonder how I came to be in the vaults as you found me."

"I have wondered."

"Then I will tell you. At least, all that I am allowed to tell you, for there is much which involves others besides myself, and therefore I am obliged to keep silent on those heads. But, as I said before, I will satisfy your curiosity by telling you all that I dare tell you."

"Do not put yourself to any inconvenience on that account," said Blueskin. "You need not tell me anything. It is by no means compulsory for you to do so. As I say, the circumstances under which I found you have aroused my curiosity and wonder to the highest degree."

"You shall be satisfied—to some extent, at any rate. You would like to know how I, a living man, came to be an inmate, or rather prisoner, in one of the vaults below the old Abbey of Westminster."

"Just so."

"I am the victim of a plot—one of the foulest plots that one human being ever concocted against another."

Blueskin remained silent, and waited for the stranger to proceed.

"I have a foe," he said. "A bitter, uncompromising enemy. Under what circumstances I incurred his resentment does not matter. Let it suffice it is so. He swore to have his revenge upon me."

"Ay—ay."

"It was only indirectly that I heard this. Personally to my face, I mean—he seemed my best friend. We were always friendly together, and I never perceived the least malice in his words or actions, so that, naturally enough, I refused to believe what had been told me concerning his words when I was not present. I disregarded them altogether. Now I find how wrong I was to do so."

Blueskin was deeply interested.

"I am all attention," he said.

"This seeming friend of mine, but bitter foe as he was in reality, continued on the most intimate and friendly terms with me. He had a reason for that. It was that he could lull me into a false security, dissipate my suspicions, and so be all the easier able to achieve his revenge. I will tell you what he did."

The stranger paused, for he found the effort to speak a painful and difficult one; however, he did not wait long, but continued:

"I see, now," he said, looking around him, "that another day has just dawned. I have, then, been upwards of twenty-four hours an inmate of that vault in which you found me—how much longer, I cannot tell. I seem to have been there an age. But let that pass. Yonder is the stand for the hackney coaches, is there not?"

"Yes."

"I must be quick, then."

While this little conversation was proceeding, the strangely-assorted pair made their way from the Abbey to that street leading from Westminster Bridge to St. James's Park, and where there was, as there is now, a long rank of hackney carriages waiting for hire.

In a more rapid voice, the stranger continued:

"This false friend of mine, against whom I had scarcely any suspicion, despite the cautions which had been whispered in my ears, invited me out with him upon a rather peculiar errand."

"I consented, and accompanied him."

"That errand was to the vaults beneath Westminster Abbey."

"My enemy is a man sprung from a goodly stock. For centuries has that vault in which I was made a prisoner been the receptacle of his ancestors' remains."

"The excuse that he made for his visit to this strange place was that he required to look at the inscription upon one of the coffins for an important purpose, and he wished me to accompany him, because it was necessary he should have a witness, and he selected me, so he said, because he felt that I was the only one of all his numerous friends in whom he could put trust."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, that was the specious plea with which he deluded me. I fell headlong and blindly into the snare thus artfully laid for me. I consented to accompany him in the capacity of witness of what took place."

"We entered the Abbey together, and then, without having any of the officials of the building for his guide, he led me down a flight of steep stone steps."

"He was provided with a small lantern, which he illuminated."

"In this way we descended the steps, and presently gained a narrow stone passage, on both sides of which were numerous iron doors, which he told me opened into the various vaults."

"At length we paused before one of the doors, and he intimated to me that we had reached the end of our journey."

"At the same time he handed me the lantern, and requested me to hold it while he felt in his pocket for the key of the vault."

"Of course I complied with his request, and took the lantern."

"After a brief search he produced the key, and fitting it into the keyhole, turned it back in the lock."

"My teeth chattered, and I felt a deadly chilliness all over me, mingled with the apprehension that some dreadful thing was about to happen."

"But I attributed this feeling to the different objects with which I was surrounded—I conceived that the nature of the place I was in would produce such a sensation as I have described."

"My treacherous friend swung the door open, and stood aside a little."

"Having the light, I supposed he wanted me to enter first, so I crossed the threshold without hesitation, in the full anticipation that he was about to follow me."

"And to a certain extent he did so."

"But no sooner did he find that I fairly stood within the vault than, springing back, he closed the door with a clang, leaving me inside."

"He was easily able to do this, for he had never let go of the key—that key which the next moment I heard turned round in the lock and the bolt shot."

"I was indeed a prisoner."

"At first I could not believe the reality of what had taken place, it seemed too horrible, but the sawdust on the floor, the coffins in the niches, and, above all, the voice of my foe, were too real for doubt to any longer hold a place within my bosom."

"Then I thought it was merely a trick he was playing me in order to test my courage, but when I heard the words he spoke to me, that idea, like the preceding one, was dissipated."

"So changed was his voice that I scarcely recognised it—it seemed like the voice of a fiend."

"He had, I fancy, stooped until his mouth was on a level with the keyhole, and it was through this orifice that the sound came."

"Then he poured into my ears a long history, and concluded with saying that I was now past all human hope."



[JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGORTH BESS ARE ATTACKED BY THE THAMES PIRATES.]

that I must die in that vault a lingering death of starvation, that it would be in vain for me to shriek and cry for help, because no human ears would hear my cries, as those vaults were very rarely used or visited. He told me that I was already dead, that his revenge was accomplished, and he left me to my fate.

"In vain I shrieked and implored his mercy. I supplanted him and used every argument which I thought would induce him to set me at liberty. But all in vain, he answered me only with a mocking laugh, which chilled the life blood of my veins when I heard it, and then he strode away along the passage.

"I listened to the sound of his retreating footsteps until, though I strained my hearing to the utmost, I could hear them no longer. I need not describe my sufferings—they were horrible. You have already seen a part; providence, however, interposed and prevented the consummation of so much villainy. You are the instrument of that mysterious power, and I have escaped the most awful of all deaths."

CHAPTER CCLXI.

BLUESKIN DETERMINES TO MAKE AN EXCURSION UPON THE HIGHWAY.

As the stranger uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded, he paused.

The stand for hackney carriages was reached.

He panted for breath, and he wiped the perspiration from his face.

It stood upon it in huge clustering beads.

To the extraordinary narrative he had just related, Blueskin listened with an all-absorbing interest.

It seemed to lift him, so to speak, above his own troubles, and produced that effect upon his mind which a romance will at times produce.

And, indeed, the story was well calculated to produce such an effect upon any one who listened to it.

It possessed all the elements needed in a relation of any wild and wonderful adventure.

Moreover, Blueskin had the advantage of hearing the words from the lips of the man himself.

"We are at our destination now," he said, "and I must bid you farewell."

"Farewell," said the stranger.

"Shall I call a coach?"

"If you do not mind the trouble."

Blueskin held up his hand and beckoned one of the drivers, who were all on the alert for a fare.

"I need not prolong my painful story," continued the stranger. "You must have already heard enough to make you comprehend the circumstances under which I became a tenant of that living tomb. The next important event was my liberation by yourself, for which I shall never be able to be sufficiently grateful."

"Do not mention that," said Blueskin, "for I cannot see that I have done anything so deserving of your gratitude. Chance alone took me to those vaults, and it was simply a duty to release you."

"I like the spirit in which you look at the affair. And, now, one word before we part."

"Willingly," said Blueskin, but, as he spoke, he cast an uneasy glance around, for it was getting light now with extreme rapidity, and he did not know what prying eye might be fixed upon him and observing all his actions.

The stranger noticed the look.

"I will not keep you. In the first place, here is a small purse, containing the bulk of the money I have about me. Take it, I pray you, and use it in the manner you may consider most to your advantage."

Speaking these words, the stranger took a small leather pocket-book from his pocket, and, thrusting it into his hand, entered the hackney-carriage and ordered the coachman to drive on, thus not affording Blueskin an opportunity of refusing to receive his bounty.

Our old friend stood on the footpath and watched the crazy vehicle take its way up the street in the direction of Whitehall.

He turned away then, and with a confused feeling about his brain, muttered—

"What a strange adventure. I cannot banish the incidents from my mind, and somehow I feel a presentiment that sooner or later I shall hear something more about it. Surely, never in the pages of old romance is anything so strange to be found. Upon what a mere chance depended his liberation from the vault! Had I not been in a manner of speaking forced to take shelter there, he would have remained its tenant still, and then, some many years hence, when the vault was opened, the curiosity of the public would have been aroused by the discovery of a skeleton in it; but there would have been nothing left to tell the tale!"

Blueskin once more looked around him.

The sun was already high in the heavens, and many people were astir.

"I must direct my thoughts to my own safety," he said. "This money reaches my hands most fortunately, for I have much need of it. Where shall I find Jack and poor Edgworth Bess? Can it be possible they have fallen into the hands of the arch fiend, Jonathan Wild, who haunts us like some ferocious animal to the death. Where shall I look for them?"

That was a question to which it was not a very easy matter to frame a reply.

"It is a forlorn hope," continued Blueskin, "but it is the only one. I must go down to the river bank where I last left them, and see if there now remains any traces of their presence."

Having come to the determination of doing something, Blueskin felt much lighter at heart, and with something of his ordinary spirit he directed his steps towards the river's side.

He made his approach carefully, however, for he was not without the reasonable dread that some of his enemies or Jonathan Wild's spies were about.

Blueskin was always uneasy upon that subject.

The few remarks he made to Ross, the landlord, will enable the reader to understand the state of his mind.

The conviction had laid hold of him that the thief-taker had got up some elaborate system of watching.

He fancied that every movement he made was noticed by some one.

If it was not so, how could the thief-taker so often and so correctly arrive at his precise hiding-place.

It was a very disagreeable feeling to have, and even at

that moment Blueskin could not divest himself of the idea that unfriendly eyes were upon him.

That, however, might have been fancy merely.

He made, however, a considerable detour, leaving Westminster Abbey on his left, and gained the banks of the Thames, somewhere about the spot where Vauxhall Bridge now stands.

Having done this, he walked along close to the water's edge.

The tide was out, and on the muddy shore were several people, all searching in the soft ooze for anything that might be of the slightest value.

From these Blueskin took a hint.

He determined to make his way along, pretending to do as they did.

The plan was a good one, and well calculated to deceive any one who was on the watch for him.

And, as the reader is well aware, there were spies of Jonathan Wild's looking very close after him indeed.

In this way Blueskin advanced, though somewhat slowly, until he reached the identical spot where he had landed.

He recognised it again instantly, and was sure he had made no mistake.

He was not without the faint lingering hope that he might find Jack Sheppard and his companion waiting for him.

He thought they might have been compelled to push off, but, if so, he fancied they would not give him up without, at least, an effort to regain him.

Jack might easily contrive, he thought, to keep the boat hovering somewhere about that spot, and have kept a sharp look out for him.

And this is, doubtless, the very course which Jack would have adopted had circumstances permitted him to do so, but we must leave that point until we can turn our attention exclusively to him.

In the meantime we have to deal with Blueskin.

He stood upright, then, and, shading his eyes with his hand, looked long and earnestly at the different craft upon the river.

The sun was shining brightly upon the water, the surface of which was broken up into numberless wavelets, the crests of every one of which reflected his beams brightly, and made the bosom of the Thames appear as though studded with diamonds.

But, however beautiful a spectacle this might have presented to an ardent admirer of nature, it had a great disadvantage so far as Blueskin was concerned.

It prevented him seeing distinctly.

But nowhere upon the sparkling surface could he distinguish that which he so much longed to see.

In vain he turned his eyes round and round, and looked in every direction, not a trace of the treasure-laden wherry could he see.

At length, with an aching at the heart, a choking sensation in his throat, and the dread that some gigantic evil had happened, he turned away.

Where should he go next?

What should he do?

Those were the questions which Blueskin asked himself, as satisfied that Jack and Edgworth Bess were not upon the river, he turned away.

He was badly situated to search for the missing ones since he was every moment in dread of capture.

But find them he must, no matter how great the risk.

With a slow step he walked across the muddy shore of the river in the direction of Westminster.

The idea in his mind was, that Jonathan Wild had managed to surprise and capture them while they sat in the boat.

At that moment he thought they might be prisoners in the dungeons beneath Wild's house.

But how was he to ascertain that?

He could not walk to the thief-taker's residence and ask the question.

In the first place, however, he made up his mind that he would go somewhere and obtain a thorough change of clothing.

After that he would get a meal somewhere, for he could feel himself sick and giddy for want of food.

In Westminster, clothes' shops are to be found in plenty, so he did not have far to go to find what he wanted.

Entering the shop, he chose a suit of plain-looking clothes, and obtained permission to go into a room and attire himself in them.

When he emerged there was a great difference perceptible and a decided improvement.

He paid the clothes' salesman from the purse which he had just had given him.

Blueskin's next visit was to a coffee shop close by, where he made a hearty but homely meal, which did him a world of good and refreshed him mightily.

"I will get a bed here," he thought. "I am much in need of sleep, and if I show myself by daylight I am liable to immediate discovery. I will wait till night, and then I will see whether I cannot find a clue to their whereabouts."

This was as prudent and sensible a course as he could well adopt.

Upon inquiry he found he could lie down for a few hours, and accordingly he was shown to a tolerably comfortable room.

Here he enjoyed a rest, and remained until dusk.

He did not wake up, in fact, until the different objects in the room were beginning to get confused by the approaching darkness.

He sprang to his feet, feeling more like himself than he had done for a long time.

He was rested both bodily and mentally.

Before he left the bed-room he washed himself plentifully in cold water, which invigorated him still more.

Then he descended, paid the money he owed, and left the house.

He had met with no disturbance yet of any kind, and therefore he very justly came to the conclusion that he had not been seen by any of Wild's spies, and he had only to continue cautious and all would be well.

The first place to which Blueskin now directed his footsteps was, as the reader will guess, Jonathan Wild's house in Newgate-street.

It was quite dark when he reached it.

He stood on the opposite side of the street and glanced up at the gloomy dilapidated residence.

As usual, not a ray of light came from one of the small and dust-begrimed windows, so that a passer-by would have come to the conclusion that the dwelling was untenanted.

There was nothing to be gleaned from the front of Wild's house.

But while he thus stood in front of that much-dreaded abode, he saw the door open.

Instinctively Blueskin drew back into the shadow of a deep doorway, which fortunately happened to be just behind him.

Upon the threshold appeared three forms, which, even in the distance and obscurity, Blueskin easily recognised.

One was Jonathan Wild himself.

His bulky-looking figure could not be mistaken.

The other his son George, about whose return Blueskin knew nothing, and who consequently was much surprised to see him there, and apparently on the most friendly terms with the thief-taker.

The third person was Quilt Arnold, who was now made much of by Wild, and considered second in command to himself.

"They don't come," Blueskin heard Jonathan say in his deep growling tones. "What's the reason they don't come?"

"They will be here in a minute, if you please, sir," said Quilt Arnold, respectfully.

At this moment the clattering of horses' hoofs arose clearly upon the night air.

Each moment the sound increased in loudness.

Then, with a sudden dash, a troop of horsemen, about twelve in number, pulled up with a dash before Wild's house.

There were two horses without riders.

Then Blueskin became aware that the thief-taker was about to set out upon one of his night excursions.

What was the object of it, however, he could not tell.

Jonathan and his son both came out, and mounted the two horses provided for them.

"Are you all here?" asked Wild, turning round.

"All."

"Forward, then; follow me. And recollect this. There is twenty pounds apiece for every one of you if you

succeed in capturing them to-night. Twenty pounds each. Forward."

With a rush, Jonathan Wild and his band swept by. They went in the direction of St. Martin's-le-Grand.

Blueskin followed them on foot as well as he was able, and saw them turn to the left up Aldersgate-street.

"What can that be?" he said. "Surely they cannot be prisoners, for who else is there that Jonathan would offer his men twenty pounds for the capture of? No, it must be Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Boss. They have, by some means or other, eluded them, and at this moment may be in a place of tolerable security. What shall I do? Get a horse and follow Wild. I should think that will be best. He may know just where they are, and then I shall be at hand to lend them my assistance in the hour of need."

CHAPTER CCLXII.

BLUESKIN STOPS A POST-CHAISE, AND HAS A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

QUITE a gush of joy came over Blueskin's heart at this proof, for so he considered it, that Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Boss were not prisoners in Wild's house.

The thief-taker and his band went onwards at a fast trot, and for Blueskin to have attempted to follow them on foot would have been simply ridiculous.

As it was, they were already almost out of sight.

This would not do.

He must keep close behind them, because, in all probability, they would guide him to the exact spot where the heiress and her protector now were.

To save them from capture, too, he must be close behind Wild and his band.

The necessity of having a horse was quite manifest.

Then Blueskin remembered that in St. Martin's-le-Grand was a livery stable, where perhaps he might hire a steed.

He went and tried.

He was answered in the affirmative, and though there was no time lost in getting the horse ready, yet it took a considerable time before he was ready.

On emerging into the high-road, not the least sound could be heard of Wild and his band.

At this, however, Blueskin was scarcely surprised, because, as he very well knew, they had been long enough to go some distance.

Plunging his spurs into his horse's sides, he set forward at a gallop.

The horse appeared to be a good one, and got over the ground in capital style.

That he was fast gaining upon those of whom he was in pursuit, Blueskin was certain, and every now and then he would pause and listen if any sounds of their horses' hoofs reached his ears.

But all was still.

Blueskin kept to the high-road, and it was not until he had gone nearly ten miles that the thought occurred to him that he might have passed Wild and his men, in consequence of their having taken some cross country road.

He was quite angry with himself to think he had come on so blindly as he had.

Still he did not feel inclined to turn back. After all, considering the start they had, the janizaries might be on the road before him.

How was he to ascertain this?

He made up his mind to stop the next passenger or vehicle he might meet and question them.

Scarcely had he made up his mind to this effect than, before him in the darkness and distance, he saw two faint twinkling lights, looking no larger and no brighter than stars.

"A vehicle," he said. "Now I shall know. Doubtless, those who occupy it have come some distance along the road, and they will be able to tell me whether they have passed a band of twelve or fourteen mounted men."

With a better spirit, Blueskin now trotted forward to meet the approaching vehicle, and, before long, he could hear the grinding of its wheels upon the road.

The lights, too, which proceeded from the lamps on either side of it grew much brighter.

At length he could distinguish the horses which were harnessed to it.

"Hoy!" he cried, in a loud voice. "Hoy! stop."

The driver, hearing these cries, so far from complying with them, only lashed his horse to make him go the faster, and he also took care to hold the whip in an aggressive sort of way, as though he would strike any one with it who attempted to impede his progress.

But Blueskin was not to be balked thus.

Turning his horse round, he galloped along by the side of the vehicle, which he now saw was a post-chaise, and cried—

"Halt—halt, I say. I want to speak to you."

But the driver took no more notice of this appeal than he did of the former one. If anything, he lashed the horses faster.

Blueskin was now by the side of the chaise, and his ears were saluted with another sound which reached his plainly above the trampling of the horses' feet and the grinding of the carriage wheels.

It was some one in a faint, smothered sort of voice crying for help.

This, coupled with the behaviour of the driver, made Blueskin feel certain that something wrong was going on, and he determined to put a stop to it if possible.

His nature would not have permitted him to go by.

"Halt," he cried again, still galloping by the side of the chaise. "Halt, I say, or, if you do not, you are a dead man."

Still no notice was taken.

Provoked by this behaviour, Blueskin drew a pistol and fired it over the coachman's head.

He was rather surprised by the result.

The man uttered a dismal howl, and fell off his seat at once.

By a sudden movement, and an exertion of the great strength which he possessed, Blueskin grasped the reins of the horse on the off-side, and turned his head round.

The effect of this was to stop the chaise at once.

At this moment the window was let down violently from the inside, and a voice, furious with passion, cried out—

"What's all this? Drive on, coachman. Drive on. Don't stop for anything. Drive on, I say."

"He is past that, I fancy," said Blueskin, trotting up.

"Ah! a highwayman!" cried the voice at the chaise window. "Take that."

Bang went a pistol, and Blueskin felt something hot fly past his cheek.

He was safe from that shot at least.

With all the coolness in the world he pulled a pistol from his pocket, and, cocking it, presented it full at the face of the man inside the chaise who had fired.

He shrank back.

Blueskin saw his advantage.

In another second he was at the window.

The man shrank still further back, until he sat down upon the seat.

Blueskin projected the pistol into the chaise until he could almost touch him with the muzzle of it.

"Now, sir," he said, "another word, another movement, and I will scatter your brains for you. I cannot possibly miss such a good aim."

The face of the man turned a shade whiter, whether with rage or fear is not certain. Perhaps the effect was produced by a combination of the two.

Blueskin's tone of voice and the expression of his face let him know he had got a man to deal with who would stand no trifling.

The same muffled voice again smote upon our friend's ear, and, looking in the direction from which the voice proceeded, he saw, huddled up into a corner, something which his vision, assisted by his imagination, made him think was a woman.

He opened the door of the chaise, and said—

"If, as I suspect, there is some one in here against their will, come out—be free."

An uneasy movement followed these words, but the huddled-up figure got no nearer to the door.

"She must be securely bound and unable to move," thought Blueskin.

He changed his pistol from his right to his left hand, and then, leaning as far as he could into the carriage, caught hold of the dusky-looking figure.

He had to put forth considerable strength to move it, for it seemed to him to have no powers of volition of its own.

However, he managed to drag it towards the door of the chaise.

The man now roused himself so far as to attempt an interference, but he was promptly checked by Blueskin showing him the pistol.

Our friend was now quite sure that the huddled-up figure was a female.

She appeared to be tied both hand and foot.

Round her head and covering her mouth was a thick black scarf.

This was not tied so tightly as to impede her breathing, or even altogether to stop her speech, for she could speak in a muffled tone.

Blueskin encircled this form (which from its slenderness must surely have been that of some young girl) with his arm, and gently drew her up on to the saddle with him.

But he soon found he was unable to keep her in this position, and at the same time maintain his influence over the man, so he was compelled to let her slip to the ground, which he did in the gentlest manner he possibly could.

He next dismounted himself, and proceeding at once to the chaise door, he compelled the man who was inside to alight.

He was evidently a coward, and destitute of all spirit to defend himself, or he would never have submitted to Blueskin in the way he did.

But that is no more than any one might expect, for who but a dastardly coward would bind a young girl as he had done, and force her to accompany him against her will.

The threat of a bullet seemed to have a powerful influence upon him.

With great speed and dexterity our old friend removed the scarf from around the lady's head and face.

He found it was of black silk, and of tolerable length.

It was just the thing he wanted.

Before the abductor of the young girl was exactly aware of what he was about, Blueskin had formed a slip-knot in one end of the scarf, and thrown it over his head.

He drew it until it fitted just tightly round his neck.

This done, Blueskin secured the other end to one of the spokes in the hind wheel of the post-chaise.

To be sure, the man could have released himself by untying one of the knots, but that was a work of time, and before he could succeed in doing that, Blueskin would be ready for him.

Our old friend would have taken more pains to bind him, but that the condition of the young girl attracted all his attention.

She seemed to have fallen into a swoon.

Moreover, now that the scarf was removed, the light of the carriage-lamps shone full upon her face, and showed it to be one of rare beauty.

She was young, too.

It was not in human nature not to feel interested in such charms.

Therefore he left the man as we have shown, and turned his attention to recovering her.

The only means he had at his command were such as a pocket-flask of spirit afforded him.

A small quantity of this he poured into her mouth, and also chafed her hands and temples with it.

He was soon rewarded for his trouble by seeing her open her eyes and look around her.

The swoon was not a very serious one, and she did not relapse.

She was still bound, so Blueskin hastened to release her.

In a feeble voice, then, for she seemed greatly exhausted, she spoke.

"Help—help!" she cried. "Save me—oh! save me from him—that dreadful man! Oh! I pray you save me from him!"

"Be under no apprehensions on that head," said Blueskin, soothingly. "You can rely upon my protecting you from him. It is beyond his power to harm you now."

The poor girl murmured her thanks, and Blueskin assisted her to rise to her feet.

He then had a better opportunity of observing her.

She was clad in plain-looking apparel—such as denoted her position in life to be the reverse of exalted.

But her face!

"That was indeed most beautiful, and Blueskin, as he gazed upon it, felt charmed, and he mentally determined to be her champion, and place her somewhere in security.

He wondered, too, how any one could be found who was willing to inflict injuries of any kind upon such a beautiful creature.

But the man who had to all appearances carried her off, looked just such a being as would exult in the destruction of anything beautiful.

The contrast between the two was striking in the extreme.

"What can I do for you?" asked Blueskin, as he supported the trembling form of the girl with his arm. "I should not have known anything amiss was going on had it not been that I wished to ask the coachman a simple question as to whether he had passed a troop of horsemen who I fancied were on the road before me."

The man ground his teeth with impotent rage when he heard this.

Blueskin continued.

"It was the behaviour of the driver which excited my suspicions. Instead of pulling up to answer me, as in common courtesy he might have done, he lashed on to the horses to make them go faster, and then, amidst the din, I heard a faint muffled voice call for help."

"That was me."

"I thought so. The rest you already know."

"I do, indeed, know it, and I shall never be able to be sufficiently grateful to you for what you have done. Give me something to do which will prove my gratitude, and see how readily and how gladly I will do it."

These simple words were uttered with an impressive earnestness, that left no doubts as to the sincerity of the speaker.

"You have saved me from a dreadful fate," she said. "A fate to me ten times more horrible than death in its most hideous and revolting form. Oh! sir, I cannot thank you."

"You have done so," said Blueskin. "You have thanked me more than I deserve."

"No—no."

"I say, yes. I did but do my duty as a man, and act in the manner my inclination prompted me. Say no more upon the point of thanks, I beg you."

"You are unkind."

"How so?"

"You will not give me the opportunity of expressing my feelings."

"I can fully comprehend them. Believe me, I would much rather you told me, with as much haste as possible, what I can do to still further assist you."

"I cannot trespass any further upon you. Doubtless, you have other matters of your own."

"No more—no more," said Blueskin. "I cannot leave you on the high-road like this. I should be unworthy of the name of man were I to do so. You must tell me of some place where you will be secure, and I will take you there."

"I have friends in London," said the young girl.

"Then I will take you there. But, stay a moment," he added, when he saw she was about to speak. "We will dispose of the gentleman first."

"No—no," vociferated the man who was tied to the wheel, and who, by his dress, could claim the title Blueskin had applied to him. "No—no. Leave me be, or you may suffer for it."

"Do what?"

"Suffer."

"Bah."

CHAPTER CCLXIII.

BLUESKIN INFLECTS UPON AN INFAMOUS VILLAIN A WELL-DESERVED CHASTISEMENT, AND TAKES THE YOUNG GIRL TO A PLACE OF SAFETY.

WITH this contemptuous exclamation on his lips, Blueskin left the young girl's side and advanced towards him.

The cowardly fellow crouched down when he saw our friend approach him.

"No—no," he said. "Spare me—spare me. Keep off."

"Spare you? Yes, so I will when I have punished you in the manner you deserve, but not before."

"Mercy—mercy."

"How can you expect me to listen to such a plea when coming from your lips—you who have turned a deaf ear to the words of this young girl when she addressed the same supplication to you?"

The man was silent.

"I will punish you—not as you deserve to be punished—but I promise myself you shall have an instalment of what is due to you."

"No—no. Keep your hands off me. Keep them off, I say. What have I done that you should touch me? I don't want the girl. It isn't me. I am only acting under orders."

"Under orders?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Simply what I say."

"That you are obeying the commands of another?"

"Exactly."

"That you have been mean-spirited and base enough to become the panderer to the lusts of some greater villain than yourself?"

The man was again silent.

"If so, then there is all the less excuse for you, and the crime you have committed all the more unnatural. You have no excuse whatever."

"Who wants an excuse?" said the man, endeavouring to pluck up a spirit.

"Why you want an excuse," said Blueskin, "and badly, too. But I can tell you beforehand, you will not be able to find one that will satisfy you. No, villain, you shall receive the reward your conduct so richly merits."

Thus speaking, Blueskin took from his pocket a piece of strong twine, and with this, under threats of immediate death if he resisted, he bound the man's hands together behind his back.

The mean-spirited wretch glared at Blueskin with the utmost dismay. He had no idea for what kind of fate he was intended, and was apprehensive accordingly.

Blueskin did not keep him long in suspense.

Having made him thus secure, he mounted to the driver's seat, and took the long horsewhip from its socket.

He gave it a preliminary swish in the air, which sounded most unpleasantly in the man's ear, and caused every hair upon his head to bristle up with anticipated torture.

Again and again did Blueskin crack the whip, so as to get used to the feel of it in his hand, and so as to be able to use it with the utmost advantage.

Each time the man gave a sympathetic start, and in imagination he almost felt the pain which the blow would produce.

"Now then," said Blueskin, "you shall have some idea of what retribution is, and I hope the punishment I am about to inflict will make you hesitate before you attempt the abduction of another girl."

A dismal howl followed these words.

Blueskin swung the whip round his head.

It was one of first-rate quality.

Crack it came down upon the man—crack—crack—each blow coming with greater speed and force than its predecessor.

His cries were terrible.

He writhed about like a serpent, but all in vain.

He tugged at the scarf round his neck until he had pulled it so tight that he was all but strangled.

Maddened with the pain, however, he gave yet another snatch, and then the knot gave way, and he fell with his face on to the ground.

But Blueskin's blood was up, and he felt he had by no means done with him yet.

Our friend's indignation knew no bounds, and he could think of no fate bad enough for such a wretch.

When he fell, therefore, he continued to rain blows upon him.

Shrieking with pain, the man started to his feet.

A cut with the whip, however, dexterously applied, sent him down upon his knees.

Another made him start up again.

Then he set off at full speed, with Blueskin after him, who never thought of giving up the chase.

But he was no match for the man in fleetness of foot.

Besides, there was this difference, he was flying from unendurable torment, and he knew that the only means by

which he could escape would be by using some extraordinary exertions.

Away, then, he went, bounding over the roadway like a hunted hare.

Blueskin kept well behind him, swinging the whip all the time, and, when he could, administering a cut.

Suddenly, however, the man lost his footing, and, with a loud yell, fell with a tremendous splash into a stagnant ditch.

Then Blueskin thought he had had enough, and he returned to the coach.

He found the young girl waiting for him, with her hands clasped in an agony of terror.

"Fear nothing," said Blueskin, "fear nothing. I have punished the scoundrel in a manner he richly deserves and will not easily forget. Now, tell me, what I can do for you. I am entirely at your service, and determined not to leave you until I have seen you disposed in some place of security."

The girl burst into tears.

"You are very good," she said, "and very kind. How am I to recompense you?"

"Say nothing at all about it. Let me assist you into the chaise. There—sit down; you will be more comfortable now."

As he spoke, Blueskin handed the young girl into the chaise again.

"And you," she said, "What will you do?"

"I will find the coachman. He is somewhere close at hand, and he will drive us to London. I shall not leave you until assured that you are in safety."

"You are very kind," said the young girl, her tears flowing afresh.

But Blueskin did not wait to hear what she said.

He busied himself in looking for the driver.

That he was unhurt, with the exception of such injuries as he might have received in falling from his seat, he felt certain.

When he fired, he had aimed at a spot many feet above his head.

He had, doubtless, fallen from cowardice merely.

Such was the case.

Blueskin looked about the spot where he had fallen, but he had disappeared.

Perhaps crawled a little way, and hid himself under the hedge.

Raising his voice to its highest pitch, Blueskin shouted—

"Coachman, come this way and drive us to town. If you refuse you are a dead man. I will count three, and then, if you do not come towards me, I will fire. One—two—"

"Stop—stop! Mercy—don't fire! Don't. I am here, good sir—I am here! Don't fire!"

From under the hedge on one side of the road there crawled a human figure, which, when it stood up to its full height, Blueskin recognised as being that of the coachman.

Trembling in every limb, he came towards Blueskin, who said—

"Mount—mount, I say, at once, and drive us to London. I will give you the address presently."

"Oh! yes; very good, sir; oh! yes. I will drive you where you like, but spare my life—oh! do spare it."

"Your life is spared," said Blueskin, "provided you at once, and without the slightest hesitation, obey all commands."

"I will obey them all, sir."

"Mount, then."

The coachman had been making abortive attempts to ascend to his box while this little dialogue was going on, but he trembled so excessively that he found it impossible.

Blueskin touched him up with the whip

That made a wonderful difference.

He clambered up somehow when that little incentive was behind him.

Then took the reins in his hands.

Blueskin, having succeeded so far, tied his own horse to the back of the post-chaise, so that he could run after it.

This done, he entered the vehicle himself, and sat down on the seat opposite to that which was occupied by the young girl, and told the coachman to drive on.

He obeyed the order at once, and, in a little while, he recovered from his trepidation, when he found that no harm was intended him if he only drove properly.

"And now," said Blueskin, after a few minutes' pause, "now that all is well so far, tell me, if you will, how it is I found you here in the condition I did."

"I will, sir; for at least you have a right to claim that at my hands. I am the only daughter of poor but honest parents, who died shortly after my birth, leaving me in the wide world alone."

Blueskin was instantly interested.

"As soon as I was able, I began to earn my own living, and continued to do so up to the present time. I lived at a little village near Hertford, and the means by which I gained my bread was by plaiting straw ready for the use of the manufactory."

Blueskin nodded.

"I lived in a cottage with a poor family, who all earned their living in the same manner, and with our united gains we were nearly always able to keep ourselves supplied with the necessities of life."

"It was our custom always to sit outside the cottage, and as we worked we could see the passengers and vehicles pass by."

"One day, about a week since, two gentlemen, mounted upon horses of beautiful form, paused before the cottage, for what purpose I don't know."

"I had seen them both before. One was the squire of the manor, and the other was his confidential attendant or companion, Colonel ——. I forget his name."

"Something was said by these two horsemen, but what it was I was too far off to hear. However, the colonel pointed either to me or the cottage and made a remark, to which the squire assented, and then both of them rode away."

The girl paused, but Blueskin did not offer to interrupt her. He wished to hear how this incident was connected with the abduction.

"I did not see them again; but to-night, just as it was getting dusk, I was standing at the little garden gate, looking up and down the road, for I had finished my day's work."

"Suddenly I saw a cloud of dust, betokening the approach of some vehicle."

On it came, and then I saw it was a post-chaise—the very one, indeed, in which we are now sitting."

"I understand."

"But judge of my surprise when, instead of continuing on its way, the post-chaise suddenly stopped before the gate."

"The door was suddenly flung open, and a man sprang out."

"He had something black in his hand."

"It was the black scarf which you found tied over my mouth."

"With great dexterity and swiftness he flung this over my head, and (how I can scarcely tell you) lifted me from my feet and placed me in the chaise, which was immediately set in rapid motion."

"I had no chance to scream. Indeed, I almost fainted at the suddenness with which everything occurred, and when I was more recovered, the scarf was twisted over my mouth in such a manner that to cry out was an impossibility."

"But, quick as he was, I recognised the person who had made me prisoner. It was the squire's companion, the colonel."

"In a little while he spoke to me, and told me that he was taking me to some one who loved me, and who would make me the happiest being on the face of the earth, and more to the same end."

"But I doubted him. A thousand vague fears sprang up in my mind, and I struggled desperately to get free."

"Finding that I would not be pacified, he bound me in the manner in which you found me, and then indeed I felt truly helpless and resigned myself to my fate."

"It was soon after this that I heard you cry out, and I made a desperate attempt to speak loud enough to attract your attention. Fortunately, you heard me."

"I did, and thought it my duty to interfere."

"Heaven bless you for it! for you have been the means of saving me from a fate I tremble at."

The young girl ceased.

Such was the narrative she poured into Blueskin's ears.

The simple and artless manner in which she told her story, and, above all, the beautiful musical voice in which she spoke, charmed Blueskin, and he was not surprised that the unprincipled squire should seek to make so beautiful a creature his own.

"And now, having told me this much, where shall I take you to, for we shall soon be in London?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Why do you weep?"

"To think that I am compelled to leave the little cottage where I have been so happy, for I feel that it would not be safe for me to live there any longer."

"I fear not, for the poor have no chance with the rich. You will now be looked upon as the possessor of a dangerous secret."

"I have an uncle and aunt in London," continued the poor girl, "and if you will take me to them they will doubtless advise me what I am to do."

"Are they friendly with you?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then go there, by all means. Where do they live?"

"In a small street leading out of the City-road."

"Could you find it?"

"Oh! easily."

"That is well, then. I propose that on reaching the City-road we discharge this chaise, and then proceed the remainder of the distance on foot."

"As you will."

"My reason is this. The driver of the chaise is unquestionably linked with your persecutors, and it is necessary to keep from them all knowledge of your whereabouts."

"How thoughtful you are."

"Caution is needed. In dealing with such men you cannot take too many precautions. I have, however, got one great satisfaction."

"What is that?"

"I have bestowed upon the rascally colonel, who doubtless suggests to his employer things of which he would never think, and puts temptations in his way—I have, I say, the satisfaction of knowing that he has received some little punishment for his wickedness. It will be a long time before he forgets me."

"I tremble when"—

At this moment the chaise came to a sudden halt, which made the young girl stop in the middle of the speech she was about to utter.

CHAPTER CCLXIV.

RETURNS TO JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS IN THE BOAT ON THE THAMES, AND RELATES HOW THEY WERE PURSUED BY THE RIVER PIRATES.

WE doubt not that the reader feels curious to a degree to know what has befallen Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess after their narrow escape from the bullets of Jonathan Wild and his men.

They succeeded in pushing off into the river with their treasure-laden bark just in time to escape injury from the volley so recklessly fired at them.

Since [that time we have never had an opportunity of recording their actions, and even now to do so we are compelled to leave Blueskin in a situation of peculiar interest.

In writing a romance it is an impossibility to keep the whole of the characters upon the page at one time.

Events in the natural order of things must occur to cause a separation, and then the only course which can be pursued is to take the threads of the narrative, one after the other, and continue them to a certain point.

In this way it often happens that, in order to preserve the synchronism of the narrative—a thing of paramount importance—one set of characters has to be left at some interesting point while the doings of other characters are placed before the reader.

Thus, in the present romance, the characters may fairly enough be divided into three sets.

All are separate and distinct.

Yet all, to a certain extent, tending to the same end.

In the first place, we have Jonathan Wild and his myrmidons in search of those he is so desirous to capture.

In the second, Blueskin, who has, by a stroke of good fortune, been separated from his two companions.

And, lastly, we have Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess upon the Thames.

Now, although it is quite possible to chronicle all that happens to these three sets of characters in different places, it cannot be done at once, any more than a man could run in three different directions at the same time.

Each has to be taken in its proper turn, and the chronological sequence of the story thus preserved.

For some time past we have been occupied with Blueskin, but, having pursued his adventures to a certain point, he must perforce give place to those who have been neglected, and come before the reader in his proper time.

We shall now occupy ourselves with those two of our characters in whom it is presumed the reader feels the greatest amount of interest, and who are in a situation of more than ordinary difficulty and danger.

In an anxious tone of voice, Jack spoke as soon as the report of the pistols had died away.

"Bess, dearest," he said. "Speak—oh! speak. Tell me if you are wounded."

"No. I am unhurt. And you?"

"Not scratched."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Thank heaven, then, for that danger safely passed through."

"Amen," responded Jack. "Steer for the bridge, dearest. I must row for our lives."

"Blueskin, where is he? What can have become of him? Is it possible that he has fallen into the hands of our arch-enemy?"

"I fear so—but I trust not."

"Alas—alas!"

"Be of good heart, dear one. Do not fear for Blueskin. He is a man of many resources, and no doubt alone will be able to avoid even Jonathan Wild."

"I hope so."

"Mind the piers of the bridge. Gently. Now we are safe. The surface of the river is as dark as pitch, and our foes do not seem to have attempted to pursue us."

At this moment the little vessel passed in safety beneath the arches of old Westminster-bridge.

More at ease with himself, Jack now only pulled gently, allowing the boat to drift with the stream.

He was puzzled to know how to act.

Where should he land?

Where should he convey the treasure to, which was so heavy as to somewhat overload the boat, and increase its risk of capsizing?

He had no idea.

He wanted Blueskin with him to suggest and advise.

It was not long before Edgworth Bess noted the state of indecision his mind was in, and she questioned him as to the cause of it.

"Do you think we are not pursued, Jack?"

"I am almost sure of it."

"Then, I should think the best thing you can do is to hover about this spot. If Blueskin escapes from Jonathan Wild, he is almost sure to come down to the water's edge to find us."

"Very true," said Jack.

"Do you think that best?"

"Assuredly. It is, indeed, the only course open to us."

Cautiously Jack Sheppard changed the course of the boat, and returned towards to the spot from which they had so recently been driven.

But though they went as near to the land as they dared, they were unable to see anything of their faithful comrade.

Wearily, indeed, did the time pass to them, and yet, as minute after minute passed away, Jack Sheppard's anxiety kept rapidly increasing.

Morning would come, and then what were they to do?

It seemed as though the treasure taken from Jonathan Wild was destined to do them no good.

The curse of blood appeared to be upon it.

It had been a trouble to them from the first.

Oh! if Jack Sheppard could only have been persuaded to consign that treasure to the bottom of the river and land upon the shore nearest to them, what an amount of suffering and horror would have been spared them.

But alas! fate decided otherwise.

That treasure was destined to be their destruction.

We must not anticipate, but content ourselves with re-

lating events in the precise order in which they occurred.

An hour passed.

During that time Jack kept rowing up and down past the spot where Blueskin had promised to make his appearance.

But there were no more signs of him now than at first.

Poor Edgworth Bess was terribly fatigued.

She was neither fitted bodily nor mentally for such scenes and trials as she had had to go through, and they had all left a visible impression upon her.

Jack could see, and his heart ached when he saw it, that she was now little more than the shabow of her former self.

Her cheeks were pale, her eyes sunken, and her whole frame terribly emaciated.

A hollow cough, too, which seemed as though it would rend her lungs, made itself heard at short irregular intervals.

These symptoms alarmed Jack more than he liked to confess, even to himself.

But his companion made no complaint—uttered no word, to say how she was suffering.

Alas! she felt that she was the victim of a cruel and remorseless fortune, and that everything was being done for her that could be done.

Without the aid and protection of Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, she would long ere this have fallen a victim to the machinations of her enemies.

Blueskin did not come.

In vain Jack Sheppard rowed the boat to dangerous proximity to the shore and strained his eyeballs to catch a glimpse of his companion's form.

Then he would lay off again, and once more wait with patience.

The dense night-mist still hangs upon the surface of the river.

It will only be dispersed when the sun pours down his ardent beams upon it.

But what is that which, like some great monster of the deep, seems to rise slowly through the mist.

Its form is huge.

Its outline shadowy.

Higher and higher it seems to rise, plainer and plainer it becomes, though it loses not its dim undefined character.

What is it?

Neither Jack nor Edgworth Bess see it, or observe its stealthy, silent approach.

Their regards are concentrated upon the shore.

Their vision is strained to the utmost, in the hope that, after all, they might see something of Blueskin.

Nearer and nearer comes the strange-looking object.

It seems to increase in size, and now it can be seen, a mass of something black, and partially defined from the thick mist environing it.

There arises no sound to warn Jack and Bess of what is coming.

They see it not, and it nears them rapidly.

What was it?

Another moment answered the question.

A slight puff of wind blew across the water, and in its course it took the mist with it.

Then was revealed a boat of large size, containing several men.

The mist, however, seemed to magnify it, for now that it was properly seen, it was much smaller than it had at first appeared to be.

It had lost altogether the gigantic appearance it had worn.

Suddenly Edgworth Bess uttered a loud shriek.

She had turned round, and her gaze had fallen upon the boat which had so imperceptibly approached them.

Jack turned round with the swiftness of lightning to ascertain the cause of this cry, for it echoed and re-echoed far over the surface of the water.

So greatly was Jack himself taken by surprise that a cry burst from his lips also, but he stifled it.

A second glance removed the awful feeling that was about his heart that it was Jonathan Wild and his men who had stolen so unawares upon him.

Those in the boat presented no resemblance to the boat-taker's janizaries, save in the expression of ferocity which was stamped upon all their features.

That was a load off Jack's heart.

But let them be who they might, the attitude which they assumed towards our friends was decidedly a hostile one.

"Boat ahoy, there," said a rough voice. "Heave to, or we'll scuttle you."

A boat-hook was raised by one of the men, who Jack saw had a sailor-like aspect.

The intention was to hold the little wherry with this, but, quick as thought, Jack plied the oars, and the frail vessel shot far over the water.

Oaths and imprecations came from the men in the boat, and they renewed their fierce cries to the fugitives to heave to.

But this command Jack altogether disregarded.

The only effect it had upon him was to cause him to increase his speed.

The men in the large boat, however, soon started in pursuit, and it could be seen at once that, for every foot Jack went, they went two.

The result of such a race as that could not be doubtful.

Still Jack plied his oars with uncommon vigour.

He had the tide to assist him, though not much, for it was close upon the turn.

In a little while the water would come surging up in the opposite direction.

Edgworth Bess was in an agony of terror.

"Oh! Jack—Jack," she cried. "What will become of us? Who are those dreadful men in the boat?"

"I think I could give a pretty good guess."

"They—they are not Wild's men."

"Oh! no."

"What are they, then?"

"Quite as bad."

"No—no."

"I am afraid so."

"Then we are lost."

"No," said Jack. "I won't consent to that. We are in danger, I know, but not lost."

"Who are these men?"

"River pirates."

"River pirates?"

"Yes. I can tell by the tone of voice in which you repeat my question that you do not quite understand my meaning."

"I do not. Are there pirates on the river?"

"Oh! yes. The Thames swarms with them, as they would tell you on board any vessel."

"How shall we escape them?"

"I know not. They seem to be gaining on us fast."

"They do."

"They are ferocious villains, and we shall have a poor chance if we fall into their hands."

"Oh! heaven have mercy upon us!"

That was the simple ejaculatory prayer which Bess uttered.

Jack bent his back to the oars, and considering the little practice he had had with such instruments, he did wonders.

The little wherry seemed to skim over the water like a bird.

But behind it—keeping ever in its wake—came the large boat; looking like some huge shark in pursuit of some small finny inhabitant of the deep.

Jack's eyes were all the time fixed upon it.

They were certainly gaining ground upon him, and rapidly too.

He saw a figure stand up in the pursuing boat.

"Heave to," he heard a voice cry—the sound coming over the water to his ears with perfect plainness. "Heave to, or we fire!"

Of this threat Jack took not the slightest notice.

He redoubled his exertions.

"Stoop, Bess—stoop," he cried. "Crouch down as low as you can in the boat. They are going to fire."

"And you, Jack—and you. What shall you do?"

"I will try to avoid their aim by changing the course of the boat continually. It is for you I feel afraid. Stoop down."

Trembling in every limb, and fairly sick at heart, Edgworth Bess did as she was bidden.

At that very moment Jack saw a bright flash, which was succeeded by a report.

It was a pistol which had been fired.



[THE THREE FRIENDS SEEK SHELTER WITH THE GIPSIES.]

The bullet, however, did no injury.

It was as ineffectual as their cry to heaven to.

But now the boat containing the Thames pirates—for Jack was quite right in his conjecture—approached with surprising swiftness.

Over the water it came like a race horse, and soon Jack saw, with a painful tightening at his heart, that in a few minutes it must reach him—that a contest and collision would be inevitable.

Cursing his unlucky fate, he still kept rowing, though his back ached fearfully and the perspiration fell in drops from his brow.

He would not give in without a struggle.

Edgworth Bess raised her head a little way and ventured to take a peep at what was going on.

"Oh! heaven!" she exclaimed, in a voice of terror. "We are indeed lost!"

CHAPTER CCLXV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS ARE MADE PRISONERS BY THE THAMES PIRATES.

LONG prior and subsequent to the period of which we are writing, the river Thames was infested with a body of men who went by the name of river or Thames pirates.

The doings of these wild lawless men have many a time been chronicled.

During the night they would go on board a boat in rather strong numbers, and direct their course to one of the numerous vessels which are always moored between London-bridge and Gravesend.

On reaching the bark, which was generally selected beforehand, they would board her, overcome the men who had been left to take charge of her, and strip the vessel of everything valuable that was at the same time portable.

Nothing came amiss to them.

In general they preferred to do their work secretly, and this was one of the modes often practiced by them.

At night such craft as are moored on the river are generally left in charge of one man as watchman—sometimes two or even more, according to the value of the cargo.

Now these pirates would dress themselves in ordinary sailors' clothes, and, whenever they could, obtain the job of watchman for one of these vessels.

When this was the case, his confederates were able to make an easy prey of the boat and get off undetected, taking their accomplice with them.

But this got found out, and the greatest caution was exercised by the owners of boats in engaging watchmen.

Still, however, the pirates continued their depredations, and at length to such an extent did they carry on their nefarious traffic, that a special police called the river-police was organized to suppress them.

Their proceedings were now rendered more difficult, but still they thrived.

Dark stories were told of the terrible deeds committed by the Thames pirates, and many a time had Jack in his boyhood been dismayed by a recital of their doings.

Every one dreaded them.

It was, indeed, a body of these desperadoes who were in pursuit of Jack and Edgworth Bess.

Whether they had learned by some means what the boat contained, was more than they could say.

With great speed they came on, but Jack would not give in.

He strained his muscles to the utmost.

It was in vain.

One more vigorous sweep was given to the oars by the men in the large boat, and then one who stood up with a long pole at one end, to which a hook was attached, swung it round, and brought it down upon the gunwale of the wherry.

So violent was the shock that the little boat heeled over, and almost capsized.

It righted itself, however.

Seeing the desperate emergency in which he was placed, Jack Sheppard sprang up in the boat with one of the oars in his hands, and strove to strike himself clear of the hook.

But to no purpose.

Other hooks were fixed, until the little wherry was drawn close to the large boat.

Half-fainting with terror, Edgworth Bess shrank back to the further extremity of the little bark, but Jack, armed with the ponderous oar, right manfully did battle with his foes.

Their numbers were, however, too great for him to stand the ghost of a chance even.

He was quickly surrounded and overpowered.

Then a heavy blow on the head rendered him insensible.

In this condition he was thrown into the large boat.

Seeing the fate which Jack had met with, and fully believing he was killed, Edgworth Bess fell into a swoon.

She was seized in a moment by one of the pirates—a man of most sinister aspect—and thrown into the large boat beside Jack.

It was then that the pirates made the discovery that the little wherry was laden with silver ingots.

Their exultation knew no bounds.

They had never expected such a booty.

They had seen Jack and Edgworth Bess in the wherry, and had attacked them merely in the hope of obtaining such valuables as they might have about them.

Then there was the boat which was worth something.

And not only that, they had a darker and more horrible reason for taking them prisoners after they were attacked.

It was that they might plunder them of every article they had about them—even to their clothes—and then dispose of their bodies to the doctors for dissection.

At the time when these events occurred the science of anatomy had not reached that point of perfection to which it has since attained.

But that perfection was only obtained by making patient examination of many subjects.

Now all doctors at that time had the greatest possible difficulty in obtaining bodies for dissection, owing to the repugnance to such a proceeding which was felt by the survivors of the deceased.

Medical men were therefore compelled to resort to other means to obtain what they required.

They soon became careless as to how the subjects were got—that was no business of theirs—they paid for them when they were brought, and there, they considered, was an end of the matter.

In this way numberless persons mysteriously disappeared, and it was not until long afterwards that the truth came out.

Such was the horrible fate for which Jack and his fair companion were designed.

We shudder and the flesh creeps upon our bones as we think of their terrible situation.

Against so many men what chance had they?

None whatever.

Bruised and insensible, they were unable to do anything to avert their frightful doom.

The thoughts of the pirates were now, however, completely occupied with the treasure upon which they had so unexpectedly fallen.

It was not often they had such a slice of luck as that.

By the directions of the one who had the command—a most ferocious-looking fellow he was, with a ragged beard and moustache—the little wherry was put in tow behind the larger one.

Without any one in it, it floated easily enough in their wake.

The order was now given to make all speed with the oars, and the vessel floated down the river in the direction of London-bridge at a rapid rate.

It would seem, however, that the villainous pirates had not been unperceived while thus engaged.

Ere long, the practised eye of one of the men, whose duty it was to keep a sharp look-out, gave warning to his comrades that something which looked like a police galley was bearing down dead upon them.

Hasty glances were cast in the direction indicated, and they found the words uttered by the look-out were quite correct.

A boat manned with the new Thames police was in full chase of them.

"Row on—row on," cried the captain, in a suppressed tone of voice to his piratical crew. "We will avoid the bluebottles if we can; if not, why?"

He interrupted himself to laugh hideously.

The remainder of his sentence, though not uttered, was clearly understood, as was proved by the manner in which the pirates chuckled.

But they bent their backs to their task, and pulled till the boat cracked again.

The speed they made was really prodigious, and would have been much greater than it was only the tide had just turned, and they were compelled to row against it.

The police galley could be distinguished with tolerable ease.

About a dozen men were seated in it.

Suddenly there was a bright flash and a report.

A pistol had been discharged in the air by the police.

That was a well-understood signal among all the craft on the river, and meant that they were to heave to and allow the police to come up with them.

But although the pirates understood the signal well enough, they never made the least attempt to comply with it.

Very soon, however, it became clear that their foes were gaining upon them rapidly, in spite of all the exertions they could make.

Perceiving this, the captain ordered the men to take it easy, and not fatigue themselves.

Since they were to be overtaken it was better at first than at last, when the strength of his men would be spent.

Besides, the captain was rather inclined than otherwise to court an engagement with the police, for he had recently devised a new mode of attacking them, and was anxious it should be tried.

At a much slower rate, then, the pirate vessel surged through the water.

The police galley came up hand over hand.

They now fired another pistol, and this time the pirate captain told his men to heave to.

He was obeyed immediately.

The police galley came on, but not quite so rapidly as before.

They had their suspicions of the pirate bark, but they might be unfounded, and it behooved them to be careful in what they did.

"Hullo!" cried some one, in a loud voice.

"Hullo!" responded the pirate captain.

"Heave to."

"Ay—ay. Here we are. Who are you?"

"Thames police."

"All right."

These words threw the police in a great measure off their guard, and they began to think they must have made some mistake.

Gently they surged through the water, until they were almost side by side with the pirate boat.

But, in the meantime, the villainous captain's crew had been busy, though they moved as quietly and stealthily as possible, so as not to attract attention.

At the bottom of their boat was a large piece of iron about a foot square.

The weight of it was enormous, for it was quite solid.

To two of the sides of this cube were fixed two long poles, which served for handles whereby the huge mass could be raised.

Slowly the pirate crew raised it up.

The police saw they were doing something, but they knew not what.

The two boats were only about three feet apart, and a touch with the oars would have brought them alongside.

Suddenly that touch was given by the pirates at a signal from their captain.

Then the men who had hold of the ends of the poles which were fixed into the iron weight rose to their full height.

They swayed the iron backwards and forwards once.

Then let go.

With a horrible rush the mass went through the air.

A cry of horror came from the lips of the police.

Too late they saw the frightful danger with which they were menaced.

There was a crash.

A scream of horror.

The next moment the piece of iron broke through the bottom of the police galley, and precipitated into the water those of its occupants who were not slain.

A triumphant yell came from the throats of the pirates when they saw how well the plan had succeeded.

At one fell swoop they had annihilated the enemy.

The police-officers swam to the edge of the pirate boat, and, catching hold of it with their hands, strove to save themselves from sinking.

But the barbarous crew mercilessly hacked their fingers until the sinews, being at length severed, they were compelled to let go.

Of all the dozen police-officers only two were left struggling on the surface of the water.

Not content with the havoc he had already caused, the pirate captain fired until the black specks disappeared.

Of the police galley all that remained was a few fragments of timber, and they were rapidly floating out of sight.

"Hurrah! my mates," said the captain, in an exultant tone of voice. "Fortune favours us to-night. She gives us victory and booty. Hurrah! for the Thames pirates!"

The boat was now in good earnest set in motion, and London-bridge at length gained.

Fortunately for them, Edgworth Bess and Jack Sheppard still continued insensible, so they were spared the horror of being spectators of the wholesale butchery we have described.

Shooting under old London-bridge, as passing under the narrow arches was called, the pirates rowed their boat through the pool, past the Tower, and so on, until the shore near Rotherhithe was reached.

At that time this place was quite separated from London, and consisted chiefly of wooden houses built here and there irregularly upon a large waste piece of ground.

Nothing could be imagined more desolate and wretched than this shore.

The ground was low, and flat, and marshy.

An aspect of squalor pervaded it everywhere.

But it was when approached at night that it presented the most disagreeable appearance.

In this region, and at the time when they approached it—about an hour or an hour and a half before daylight—it was wholly deserted.

Not a single living thing was in sight.

It was at this moment that Jack recovered from the effects of the blow he had received upon his head.

As might be expected, his faculties were very much confused, and it was a long time before he could comprehend his position.

However, he had the good sense to lie still, and not betray by the least movement that he had gained possession of his senses.

He was lying on his back, and when he opened his eyes he could see the dark cloudy sky above his head.

Then with a rush recollection came over him.

He was a prisoner, and he soon found he was lying in a boat which was filled with men.

And where was Edgworth Bess?

At first he did not dare hardly to turn his eyes round in search of her, for fear he should be noticed and perhaps subjected to some fresh ill-usage.

He could feel he was unbound, and that all his limbs were at liberty.

Slowly he moved his head from side to side, and strove to pierce the darkness with which the body of the boat seemed filled.

Presently his eyes fell upon what looked like an undistinguishable mass of clothing.

His heart, however, told him that it was the companion of his misfortunes—poor Edgworth Bess.

CHAPTER CCLXVI.

JACK SHEPPARD HAS SOME RATHER REMARKABLE ADVENTURES IN THE RUINED MILL.

AN inaudible groan came from Jack Sheppard's lips when he thought of the manifold dangers which the poor girl had passed through.

Fain would he, if it had been in his power, have shielded her from all harm, to have tended her, waited upon her as he would upon some rare exotic plant too delicate to bear the blustering winds to blow upon it.

Instead of that, however, he did nothing but bring her into additional peril.

Suddenly Jack felt the boat's keel grate upon the shore, and then he rightly enough imagined his journey was at an end.

The boat was moored, and the men hastily got out of it.

The captain saluted him with a kick, and a groan came from Jack's lips.

"Get up, will you?"

Jack struggled to his feet.

He was still suffering rather severely from the blow on his head.

"Now, then, out of the boat with you. Wright and Harris!"

"Ay—ay, sir."

"Look after the prisoners, and see them safely bestowed. Take care of them. No bruises, you know."

"All right, captain."

The two men approached.

One lifted up Edgworth Bess, and carried her in his arms as though she had been a feather.

The other caught hold of Jack rather roughly by the arm, and he was compelled to follow.

The captain busied himself in looking after the ingots, and seeing that his men did not appropriate any of them to their own uses.

Looking around him, in order if possible to discover whereabouts he was, Jack saw just before him a ruined mill.

It was built close to the water's edge.

Its appearance was neglected in the extreme.

Indeed, it seemed as though a puff of wind of more than usual force would blow it down at once.

But that was illusory.

The old mill was, on the contrary, as firm and strong as could be wished.

It had weathered many a gale, and the probability was it would weather a great many more.

It was towards this mill that the two men directed their steps, so Jack came to the conclusion that that was their destination.

And so it was.

It is quite certain, though, that Jack would never have submitted so quietly as he did if it had not been for Edgworth Bess.

It was for her sake he made no effort to free himself

from his captor's grasp. He might have escaped alone, but he never thought of that. He could not have rescued Edgworth Bess, and he preferred captivity with her to freedom without her.

A few minutes brought them to the ruined mill.

There was a crazy-looking staircase, or rather ladder, which reached half-way up the mill, and then abruptly terminated.

It seemed as though the upper portion had been broken off.

To all appearances, the remaining part was so frail that no one would have thought of risking their neck by ascending it.

Besides, there was no motive to induce them to run into so much danger, for the steps did not lead anywhere.

At least, visibly they did not.

But, as the reader doubtless suspects from the trouble we have taken, there was a mystery connected with that staircase.

Its frailness was nothing like so great as it appeared to be.

It had been made to purposely look so, however, for the express purpose of deterring any stranger from ascending it.

And it answered the purpose admirably, for no one had as yet been rash enough to attempt it.

On reaching the bottom, however, the man who carried Edgworth Bess shifted her from one arm to the other, and ran up with the agility of a squirrel.

When within a few feet of the top, he paused and tapped in a peculiar manner upon the woodwork of which the mill was built.

In a moment an opening was disclosed by the slipping away of several planks.

Through this opening he passed.

Jack was told to ascend before his captor, and he did so.

Passing through the opening, he found himself at the top of some more steps which led downwards.

The opening was closed up as soon as his captor was inside, and then all was in profound darkness.

"Descend!" was the word uttered in Jack's ear as the man resumed his hold upon his collar.

As Edgworth Bess had gone before him, Jack was only too glad to follow.

He was anxious in the extreme not to let her be one moment out of sight, for fear that during the brief interval some mischief might be done her which his interposition would prevent.

Accordingly he descended, and with rather more rapidity than his captor thought necessary, so he checked him.

"You need not be in such a hurry to go down, my young spark; you will be glad enough to have a chance to come up, I know."

Jack did not deign any reply to this, but he felt certain that they were going down much lower than they had come up.

And in this he was right, for he was now below the level of the earth, and among the foundations of the old mill.

At length the descent was stopped, and after proceeding a few steps along a passage, they emerged into a place, the appearance of which was curious enough.

It was a large place, but crossed in every direction with huge beams of wood.

These were used to support the structure overhead, and in their existence lay the secret of the mill continuing to stand while in so ruinous a condition.

Jack looked about him with great curiosity.

The place was tolerably well lighted with a large fire which was blazing in the centre of the apartment, for so, for want of some other name, we are compelled to designate it, and as far removed from any of the beams as was possible.

To Jack's joy he saw that Edgworth Bess was near this fire, where the man had placed her, and he also saw that she was giving signs of returning consciousness.

The two pirates, to whom, of course, Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess were perfect strangers, evidently considered they were not capable of doing much harm, for they released him, and the two were left to themselves.

Jack's first impulse was to rush to the side of the poor

heiress and to strive by all means in his power to calm her, to soothe her agitation, and restore her to her proper self.

It was only natural that the pirates should have a poor idea of Jack's prowess, for he looked very slim and boyish, and as though quite incapable of striking a blow in his own defence.

And he retained this remarkable juvenility of face and form up to the day of his death.

For a long time all his efforts to restore Edgworth Bess were quite in vain, but eventually he succeeded.

They were interrupted by the arrival of the captain and the rest of the band, bringing with them the treasure.

But that fatality of which we have spoken still seemed to continue to attach itself to it.

It brought nothing but misfortune upon its possessors. We shall see how the pirates fared with it.

Jack could not help feeling much chagrined when he saw the ingots he had had so much trouble to obtain.

But he ought to have rejoiced to think the ill-fated treasure was about to pass away from him.

There was a feeling of great elation about the hearts of the pirate captain and his band, and it showed itself in their countenances.

It was perhaps for this reason that they behaved more leniently to Jack and Edgworth Bess than they generally did to their prisoners.

At ordinary times such individuals as unfortunately fell into their clutches received the harshest of treatment.

But, looking upon Jack and his companion as a mere boy and girl, they omitted to take such precautions as they generally did.

A carouse was unanimously called for.

A large table was made by placing a broad piece of wood on the tops of some barrels.

Other barrels of a smaller size furnished them with seats.

Spirits were then produced and pipes lighted.

Then the carouse fairly began.

Such a boisterous one had perhaps never been known among the foundations of the old mill.

Shrinking down by the fire as far out of the way of the pirates as possible, our two friends watched their every movement with the greatest anxiousness.

Whenever he could do so Jack whispered words of consolation to the poor trembling girl by his side.

He showed her that they were far indeed from being quite lost; that they had their limbs at liberty; and Jack spoke confidently of making his escape.

And Edgworth Bess felt her spirits cheered by the words he spoke, for she had great faith in his capabilities.

Morning dawned, but they had no idea of it, for no ray of daylight ever found its way to the pirates' subterranean haunt.

Presently one of the men who had been seated with the rest rose from his place and approached the fire.

His comrades scarcely noticed him, but our friends watched him closely and eagerly.

On reaching the fire this man gave the embers a poke, which caused them to burst into a flame.

Then, putting his hand in his pocket, he drew forth a small piece of paper.

Why they felt their gaze so riveted upon that piece of paper, Jack and Bess would have been puzzled to say, but they gazed upon it with an all-absorbing interest.

Slowly the man unfolded it, and then they saw that something was printed upon it in rather large letters.

The man perused it.

When he had read for a minute or two, he raised his head and looked earnestly at Jack, whose face and form, as well as his companion's, were plainly revealed by the ruddy light of the fire.

Jack's anxiety changed to uneasiness.

It increased when he saw the man resume his reading, and then fall to a perusal of Edgworth Bess.

The man read the paper once more, and then, with a satisfied look on his face, he restored it to his pocket.

Probably our two friends alone noticed his actions.

Certainly they were the only two that attached any importance to them.

The carouse lasted a long while, but at length it came to a conclusion.

Hours passed by.

The pirates for the most part slunk into out of the way nooks and corners, where they laid down to sleep off the effects of their debauch.

From the time the man had read the paper, Jack scarcely took his eyes off him for a moment.

But presently he slunk off like the rest.

At length there remained but one man in sight, and he seemed drowsy to a degree.

It would appear, however, that he had been appointed as a watch over the two prisoners.

Doubtless, the difficulties in the way of any stranger making an escape from that place were very great.

Upon such a supposition only can we account for the pirates leaving our two friends as they did.

A profound silence prevailed in the place where for so long there had been such boisterous behaviour.

The man on guard sat on a cask, nodding his head backwards and forwards in a somnolent sort of way.

It was now that Jack considered he had a favourable opportunity of speaking to his companion, and he availed himself of it.

She was clinging tightly to him, as though for protection against any peril that might assail her.

"Bess," said Sheppard, in a low, faint whisper.

"Bess!"

"Yes, Jack."

"Speak to me in a whisper, dear one, for fear we should be overheard."

The young girl nodded.

"We must escape," continued Jack.

"How?"

"I know not yet. In the best manner we can. It is imperative we should do so, and that at once, or we shall fall into the hands of our ferocious foe."

"Jonathan Wild?"

"Even he!"

Edgworth Bess cast a terrified glance around her.

"How could he come here?" she asked.

"Hush! I will tell you my suspicions. Did you notice one of the men come to the fire and stir it?"

"Yes."

"And then did you notice that he took a paper from his pocket?"

"Yes," replied Edgworth Bess, "and he unfolded and read it."

"He did," said Jack; "but did you notice as he read it that he from time to time interrupted himself to look at us?"

"I remember he did look at us strangely, now you mention it."

"Ah! Then I can see, dearest, that you do not share my suspicions."

"What are they?—what are they? Oh! tell me—tell me at once!"

"I will. That paper he was reading contained an accurate description of both our persons, and the reason he kept looking up to us in the manner he did was to compare the description with us, and then see whether it agreed."

"Oh! Jack, you fill me with a thousand fears! How could he have a printed description of us? for it was a printed paper he held in his hand. I saw some of the letters myself."

"So did I. In fact, I was able to make out one word which stretched right across the paper."

"What was that?"

"Reward!"

"Reward?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all, Jack, tell me all. This suspense is very dreadful."

"I can give you my suspicions in a few words. If I mistake not, that man is a spy in the employ of Jonathan Wild."

"Oh! heaven!"

"Hush! hush!"

"I am still."

"Pray keep so, or we may find it quite impossible to escape."

"I will! I will! Go on, Jack, go on!"

"I say, then, it is my conviction that the man we are speaking of is a spy in the employ of Jonathan Wild—that the paper he read contained an accurate description of ourselves—that he has recognised us—and that he is

now on his way to Jonathan Wild, to inform him where to find us; and in a little while we may expect to see him here, with a troop of janizaries at his back.

Edgworth Bess glared into Jack's face as he uttered these words with an expression of speechless dismay.

For a moment she felt as though she should swoon, but with a great effort she recovered herself.

"Oh! Jack! Jack!" she moaned, "we are lost! What can we do?"

"Escape!" said Jack, in a hoarse whisper! "Escape!"

CHAPTER CCLXVII.

JONATHAN WILD IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH THE WHEREABOUTS OF JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS.

As it so happened, Jack Sheppard's suspicions were perfectly well founded and correct.

The man who he had seen come to the fire was, indeed, no other than one of Jonathan Wild's spies.

We have often adverted to the extensive system of espionage which the thief-taker kept up.

He had spies, as one might say, everywhere.

It was the duty of these men to report anything important which came under their notice, and they were sure of having a good reward for doing so.

This was tolerably well known, and it may be stated with precision that no body of men of any number ever assembled, either in or about the metropolis, without numbering amongst them one of the spies.

In fact, in every place where there was the remotest probability of their being of any use to him, there was a spy to be found.

Now Jonathan Wild, in his anxiety to capture our three friends, had taken what he considered were some very effective steps indeed.

And so they were.

He had some bills privately printed, offering thirty pounds reward.

One of these he had placed in the hands of every one of his spies, whose particular instructions were to make themselves well acquainted with the contents of it.

These bills contained—

A close and accurate description of Edgworth Bess, Jack Sheppard, and Blueskin.

Knowing them so well as he did, Jonathan was able to describe them with very great exactness.

The terms of the bill were as follows.

The reward was divided into three equal portions of ten pounds each, and these sums would be given to any one who pointed out the position of the fugitives.

If one was seen, the man who saw him only had to go to Jonathan with the information and receive the reward.

Now, this pirate we have referred to had received a bill in common with the rest, but, considering he stood not the slightest chance of meeting with the persons described, he had paid very little attention to it.

But, while sitting carousing with his mates, the idea all at once came into his head that the prisoners they had taken were two of the persons Wild wanted.

If so, he was, of course, entitled to the sum of twenty pounds.

It was worth a little trouble to ascertain this, so he watched his opportunity, and, going to the fire, read the paper in the manner we have described.

The description given of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess so entirely corresponded with the two persons before him, that he had not the shadow of a doubt even left upon his mind.

Accordingly he folded up the paper and returned it to his pocket.

He had resumed his seat with his comrades, but he took care to drink with far greater moderation than they did.

At length, when the carouse was over—he knew it would have attracted notice, if not suspicion, had he left before—the man withdrew along with the rest, for the ostensible purpose of lying down somewhere and sleeping off the effects of what he had drunk.

Instead of doing this, however, he had made his way to the passage leading from the mill.

He passed by a sentinel who was asleep on his post, and ascending the steps, left the mill by means of the crazy-looking ladder.

Upon emerging into the open air he found it much later than he could have thought.

Evening was fast drawing in, and already the more distant objects around him were involved in gloom.

But at that time of the year the days are short, and on this particular day it was darker much earlier than usual, for a dense mist that had risen from the river spread itself over the land.

Fain would this spy of Jonathan Wild's have adopted some additional means of keeping the two prisoners secure, but that was a matter in which he felt he dared not interfere, so he was obliged to leave things as they were, and trust to them not being able to escape.

He made the best of his way to the thief-taker's residence in Newgate-street.

But it took him some time to reach it, and when he arrived it was quite dark.

He knocked at the door, and was answered by Tonks, who told him Jonathan was at home.

The spy then took the bill from his pocket, and said—

"Please to give this to Mr. Wild, and tell him I am waiting for an answer."

The spy knew very well that he should be understood.

Breathless Tonks came into the hall.

"Upstairs," he said; "go upstairs. He is in the front room on the first-floor. Mind you knock before you go in."

With this friendly caution, Tonks stood aside and allowed him to ascend the stairs.

The spy easily enough found the door to which Tonks had directed him, and he knocked at it in a very humble manner indeed, having first pulled his hat off.

He heard a growling sound follow his knock, and he translated it into "come in," so he opened the door accordingly.

The room was quite full of tobacco-smoke, so that he could scarcely see across it.

Through the mist, however, he presently discerned the form of the thief-taker, and that of some other person seated at the table.

That was the thief-taker's son.

The precious pair had been smoking for some time, and occupying themselves with the concoction of fresh villainies.

The reader will remember that when we referred to Wild and his son last, they were both engaged in speculating upon the same point.

The result of their reflections was this.

Jonathan Wild made up his mind that he would trust his son, but no further than was necessary.

On the other hand, George had come to the determination to join his fortunes to his father's, carry out all his instructions, and be faithful until he could see a time when his purpose would be best answered by betraying him.

Such was the hollow kind of understanding which had been come to between the precious pair.

Two such clever ones as they were were not at all suitable for partners.

We shall see how events progressed.

At present they were on the best of terms with each other.

With these words of explanation we will resume.

"You sent me this paper," said Wild, senior. "And I to understand by that that you have some information to give me respecting the people described?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild, sir, if you please."

"I do please, villain."

"Then, Mr. Wild, I humbly ask for the reward."

"What reward?"

"Twenty pounds."

"Ya—ah!"

"I have found two of the persons described there."

"Where are they—where are they? Tell me where they are, and you shall have the reward."

And Jonathan put his pocket-book on the table.

"Take it easy," interposed his son. "You know easy always does it."

"Easy be d—d!"

"All right, guv'nor. You're going to fail again."

"Stop your jaw."

"I might just as well, for you are as obstinate as a pig, and it's not a bit of good talking reason to you."

And Wild, junior, relapsed into silence—resuming his pipe with great energy.

The spy looked with something like wonder at the young man who had dared to treat the great thief-taker in so defiant and off-hand a manner.

But of course he said nothing.

Jonathan Wild took two ten pound notes from his purse.

"Now," he said, "here's the reward. You shall have it the moment you tell me which are the two you have found, and where they are."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Which are the two?"

"The boy and the girl."

"The boy and the girl?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I know. All right. Go on. Where are they?"

"I can take you to them at once. But I should like to give you some particulars."

"Go on."

Having received this permission, the spy proceeded to state how he had been in the boat on the Thames along with the Thames pirates, and how they had captured a wherry with two prisoners in it and a quantity of silver ingots.

With a yell, Jonathan sprang to his feet.

"Mine, at last," he cried. "Mine, at last! All mine—all!"

"Easy does it, guv'nor. Easy does it," interposed Wild, junior, again. "It appears to me, you have got some very important information indeed."

"I have—I have."

"But don't make a rumpus. Give the man his reward if he has earned it, and then we can talk over matters."

"Yes—no."

"I'm d—d if you ain't going mad, guv'nor. What do you mean by yes and no?"

"Silence, idiot."

"The same to you."

"I meant yes, I would give the man his reward, having fairly earned it, and no because I should not stop to talk matters over."

"Oh! very well, guv'nor. Have things your own's up! I way, and be d—d to you."

"George."

"What?"

"While you behave as you do we shall never get on."

"You mean yourself."

"Bah!"

"I have had occasion to remark, at least twenty times you are the d—dest fool alive."

"Cease this folly, I say. You waste too much time in useless deliberation. That is how we missed them. Give me prompt action."

"So say I, guv'nor, but, before I begin a thing, I like to know what I am going to do."

"But, can't you see? Don't you understand? The boat we fired at fell into the hands of these Thames pirates. They made the two persons in it prisoners, and have conveyed them and the treasure to their secret haunt, which is well known to me. What could be more simple? I will summon my men, and set off in pursuit."

Jonathan did not wait to hear what his son said to this, but banged away with his bludgeon on the table at a furious rate.

Tonks was not long before he made his appearance.

The order was then given to assemble all the men he could in the shortest possible space of time, and for them to bring spare horses to the door.

"Shall I go with him, Mr. Wild?" asked the spy.

"Yes, and get a horse for yourself, so as to accompany us. Stay, here is your reward."

Jonathan handed the man the two ten pound notes he had taken from his purse.

Then he disappeared along with Tonks.

In the meantime, Jonathan Wild very deliberately knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and proceeded to look to his weapons.

His delightful son followed his example.

"Now, George," he said. "Come with me."

"All right, guv'nor. I'm a coming."

"And don't treat me to so much of your jaw. I don't like it."

"Then you shan't have it, guv'nor. There, now, that fixes you, and you can't get beyond that. Lor', now, if you would only take things easy like I do. But you are

so very violent, and fly into a passion about nothing at all."

"Bah.

"You don't like to be told of your faults. Very few do. I wouldn't myself. But, guv'ner."

"What?"

"How are you going to act?"

"How I said."

"Shall you attack these pirates, or ask them to give up their prisoners?"

"Attack them."

"Oh!"

"Don't you see, George, I shall not only accomplish my own individual ends, but I shall also get credit with the authorities as well."

"A very desirable thing, I should think."

"Oh! very. I don't stand in quite such good odour with them as I did a little while ago."

"This is a chance, then, guv'ner."

"It is. You see, while securing Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, I shall capture a strong band of Thames pirates."

"Did you know of their existence?"

"Oh! yes; from the first."

"You are a wonderful man, guv'ner, after all."

Jonathan pretended not to notice this compliment, but continued—

"Only it never answered my purpose to apprehend them—never having been in my way, you understand—but now the case is quite altered."

"It is."

"Why, I shall win renown in this achievement. By delivering up these offenders to justice who have so long defied the laws, and set at nought every attempt to capture them, I shall obtain such a reputation, and make my position so secure, that I shall be able to defy all my numerous enemies."

While this little conversation had been going on, neither Jonathan Wild nor his son were what could be called idle.

They occupied themselves with their weapons and in storing ammunition about their persons, as well as making necessary alterations in their apparel.

By the time they had concluded, they heard the clattering of horses' hoofs on the stones in the street below.

"Come, George," said Wild. "The horses are waiting."

"I am ready, guv'ner. At least, have you got a sword in the house?"

"What for? You have one by your side."

"I know I have."

"What more do you want?"

"Why, I suppose it is one of yours, and it is a great deal heavier in the blade than I like."

"I have a lighter one here."

Jonathan opened a cupboard-door as he spoke, and disclosed a great number and variety of offensive and defensive weapons.

George Wild soon found a sword that would suit him, and being thus provided he followed his father down the staircase to the front door of the house.

Two of the bull-dogs were holding a couple of spare horses by the bridles, and Wild and his son vaulted into their saddles without delay.

CHAPTER CCLXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD ATTACKS THE PIRATES IN THE RUINED MILL.

OUR readers must understand that the events we have just recorded took place on the day which followed the night when Blueskin had his extraordinary adventure in Westminster Abbey.

That day which Blueskin had passed the greater part of asleep at the little coffee-house in Westminster, where he had some refreshment.

The reader will be able to call to mind that when he rose it was just getting dark, and that he set out to Newgate-street in the hope of being able to pick up some information respecting Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess.

By the time he arrived opposite the thief-taker's residence it was quite dark, and night had fairly set in.

It was while here that Blueskin heard the trampling of

horses' hoofs, and drew aside into the shadow of a contiguous doorway, in order to observe what took place.

He was rewarded for his trouble by seeing the band of bull-dogs ride up, and Jonathan and his son emerge from the house and mount the two steeds provided for them.

To Blueskin the person of George Wild was very well known, and he recognised him instantly.

He recollected, too, quite well the circumstances under which he had left his father's house, and he marvelled greatly at his return.

And more still at the palpable fact that he was on good terms with his rascally parent.

This afforded Blueskin matter for much uneasy thought.

Jonathan had got an ally.

He had been treacherous, but what of that? Perhaps he would not be again.

Blueskin watched Jonathan and his son mount.

He saw them turn their horses' heads and go in the direction of the city.

Then, as we have elsewhere related, Blueskin went into a stable for the purpose of procuring a horse, and then missed them.

We will follow Jonathan and his myrmidons.

At a very rapid pace he led the way in the direction of London-bridge, crossing over which he proceeded through the village of Bermondsey to Rotherhithe.

The spy took upon himself the office of guide.

At length the old mill was reached.

The pirates were within, drinking and carousing, and little dreaming of the attack which was about to be made upon them.

They had everything to fear from such an attack.

Their treacherous comrade would point out to the assailants the weakest part in the defences.

He would lead them into the citadel.

The force Jonathan brought with him was a strong one, considering the pirates he was about to attack did not number more than a dozen men.

Such being the case, he was able to post several as sentinels without weakening the main body too much.

This he did.

Then when every preparation was made.

When every man had his weapons ready for immediate service.

Jonathan Wild and his son followed the spy up the rickety flight of steps on the outside of the mill.

So far all was well.

Now the difficulties of the enterprise would begin.

The spy tapped on the piece of woodwork in the side of the mill in the peculiar manner which would be recognised by the sentinel inside.

The piece of wood slid away in a moment.

The spy had made Jonathan and George stand back, so that when the door opened the man inside should not see them and give the alarm.

In a quiet way the spy stepped through the doorway into the little landing inside the mill, and the moment he did so, instead of descending to the room below as the man on guard fully expected he would, he turned round and grasped him by the throat so tight that the man could make no articulate sound.

"Silence," he said, "or you are a dead man. If you offer to move or speak I will plunge this knife into your heart."

The man was cowed by the stern, determined way in which these words were uttered, and he became passive at once.

Jonathan Wild appeared at the opening.

He could not see inside the mill on account of the intense darkness which prevailed there, but the spy could see him plainly enough, because his body was much darker than the night sky behind it.

"All right, Mr. Wild," he said, in a whisper. "I have got the sentinel a prisoner. Here he is."

The spy dragged the man forward as he spoke, and Jonathan caught hold of him.

It was the easiest matter in the world for the thief-taker, gifted with such extraordinary strength as he was, to take hold of this man by the neck and drag him through the aperture on to the ladder.

The man, who fully believed his last hour was come, and who was besides a coward, offered no resistance.

When he had got him on the ladder, Jonathan passed

him down to his son, who in his turn handed him to the man who stood next.

It was in this way that the spy reached the ground, and upon his arrival there he was immediately strongly secured.

The spy now bade Jonathan follow him, describing the nature of the place as he did so.

Jonathan complied.

Then the descent of the interior staircase was commenced and accomplished in safety.

At the bottom of these stairs, the reader will recollect, there was a passage.

In this Jonathan came to a halt, and, as noiselessly as possible, assembled his men in a body, so that they would be in a condition when he gave the word of command to rush forward in a mass and take the pirates by storm.

The sounds of drinking, shouting, singing, swearing, all reached their ears in a bewildering chorus.

At length the men were properly assembled, and then the spy pointed out a door that was before them.

It could be seen, because there was a strong light within which made itself visible through numerous crevices both in and around it.

The spy led the way.

He knew just where the fastening of the door was situated, and he placed his hand upon it.

In suppressed tones Wild said—

"Forward."

The men made a rush, and the same moment the spy, flinging the door open, allowed them to pass.

The interior of the apartment presented much the same appearance as it did when we last described it.

That is to say, the table was put up, and the pirates were seated around it carousing.

But at the trampling of feet and the sight of Wild's men, they rose to their feet in the greatest dismay.

Their weapons had been laid aside, for nothing was further from their thoughts than that an attack would be made upon them.

"Surrender!" yelled Wild, at the top of his voice.

"Surrender. You cannot escape, and if you give in at once your lives will be spared. Surrender, I say—surrender!"

"Never!" said the pirate captain, in tones a good octave higher than Wild's. "Don't believe him, my gallant comrades. Down with him. Seize your weapons Hurrah!"

The pirates, who had just drunk enough to make themselves valiant, responded to the hurrah their leader had uttered, and then hastily possessed themselves of their arms.

Seeing this, Wild instantly gave the word for an attack to be made upon them.

A terrific conflict ensued.

The table and the barrels under and around it were overturned.

Foremost in the fray—brandishing his huge heavy hanger around him as if it was a straw—Jonathan Wild personally proved the most deadly foe the pirates had to encounter.

George Wild seconded his efforts in a manner which showed that, let his vices, deficiencies, and failings be what they might, cowardice was not one of them.

The pirates, however, gave no symptoms of submitting and paid not the slightest attention when they were called upon to surrender.

Jonathan's men suffered severely.

The contest was chiefly a hand to hand one with swords, very few pistol shots being fired.

At length, after fighting for nearly a quarter of an hour, those few pirates who survived flung down their weapons and sued for quarter.

This was immediately given, for Jonathan would much rather have had them alive than dead, so they were securely bound.

Having succeeded thus far, Jonathan had the most important part of the business to do.

That was to secure the two prisoners.

When he had done that, his triumph would be almost complete.

When the spy flung open the door, the first thing he did was to look in the direction of the fire, where he had left the two captives seated.

They were no longer there.

A dread was in his heart that, after all, he should be balked of the additional reward which would fall to his share provided they were captured.

Familiar as he was with the intricacies of the place, he darted at once among the timber supports and began an ardent search.

Every step he took, though, only served to confirm him in the idea that the prisoners had escaped.

It was not long before he had made a close examination of the underground apartment, but the result of it was that they were nowhere to be found.

It was just as he felt sure of this, and emerged from among the timber, that Jonathan Wild, having achieved a complete victory over the pirates, turned to commence the search.

His eye fell upon the spy.

"The prisoners!" he yelled. "The prisoners! take me to the place where they are confined. Quick! quick! I say."

"Mr. Wild"—

"What, villain?"

"When I left here to seek for you they were seated there, close to the fire."

"Ha!"

"And now they are nowhere to be found, although I have closely searched the place in every direction."

"A thousand curses! Disperse—disperse, all of you! Take torches from the fire, and leave not a nook or corner of this place unvisited; they have doubtless hidden themselves during the affray."

The men obeyed.

"Mr. Wild," said the spy, catching hold of the thief-taker by the skirt of his coat, and arresting his further progress; "Mr. Wild."

"What?"

Jonathan turned round suddenly.

An angry look was in his eyes.

"Would you permit me—humbly permit me—to offer you a suggestion?"

"What is it? Speak."

"During my absence the pirates may have thought the prisoners not altogether safe."

"Ha! I see."

"And they may have adopted some precautions to keep them in safety. I would recommend you to speak to the chief, and question him about them."

"I will—point him out to me."

The pirate captain was a prisoner and rather severely wounded.

Jonathan strode up to him.

In a voice of assumed calmness he spoke.

"You took two prisoners last night in a boat on the Thames?"

The captain nodded.

"I want them."

The captain shook his head.

"Tell me where they are—show me where you have placed them, and your life shall be spared. I promise you that."

The captain again shook his head.

Wild grew impatient.

He held his sword in a threatening attitude.

"Now tell me where they are," he said, "or you die instantly."

The pirate captain made several very powerful efforts to speak.

He opened his mouth and a gush of blood came from it.

Then he managed to articulate the one word—

"Escaped!"

"Escaped!" yelled Wild, in a voice of frenzied fury.

"Escaped!—how, when, where?"

But these questions were not replied to.

The head of the pirate captain suddenly fell forward on his breast.

The muscles in his neck appeared to have lost their rigidity.

He was dead.

The men who held him found he became a dead weight in their grasp.

They released him.

He fell headlong to the floor.

To describe Jonathan's rage would be altogether impossible.



[THE THREE FUGITIVES HALT AT THE SUICIDE'S GRAVE.]

He cursed, he swore, he tore about the place like a madman in the direst extremity of delirium.

These repeated defeats were trying in the extreme to Jonathan's temper—never one of the gentlest and most amiable.

Had fate determined that he should be for ever baffled and defeated in all his attempts against these two persons?

It looked like it.

But Jonathan would not have it so.

Taking a large piece of pinewood from the fire, the shape of which was something like a torch, and which was blazing brightly, he held it aloft above his head, and dashed into the recesses in the foundations of the old mill.

Narrowly and closely did he search, for Jonathan Wild was of course quite an expert and proficient at that sort of thing.

He never went over the same ground twice, and he left no place unvisited.

But the numberless beams of wood, crossing and recrossing each other as they did in every direction, were rather bewildering even to him.

In and out he went—up and down—followed at every step by his men.

In their closest search, however, they were unable to find a trace either of those of whom they were in search or of any outlet to the place.

Jonathan looked as closely after one as the other, and when he could not find there was any means of egress from the underground apartment besides that by which he had entered, he came to the conclusion that the two fugitives were only hiding somewhere.

If they were in the mill, Jonathan determined to have them.

They could not leave it if they had not already done so, for the place was surrounded on the outside by his men, who would not on any account permit them to pass.

CHAPTER CCLXIX.

THE ADVENTURES OF JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGORTH BESS IN THE RUINED MILL.

LEAVING Jonathan Wild and his band of janizaries, as he loved to call them, to prosecute their search among the intricate foundations of the old mill, we will turn our attention to Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess themselves, and relate what took place after we saw them last.

When last presented to the reader, they were seated close to the fire which was now fast expiring.

The furious carouse in which the pirates had been indulging had come to a conclusion.

One by one they had slunk away into odd nooks and corners, in order to sleep off the fumes of what they had drunk.

The spy had started to find Jonathan Wild, and to betray his comrades.

One man had been left as a kind of sentinel or watch over the prisoners.

He had partaken rather freely of the contents of the cup, and he was more fit to join his comrades in their slumber than anything else.

Every now and then his eyes would close, and his head drop upon his breast, but with a start he would recover himself and look around him.

He struggled manfully against the combined soporific tendencies of what he had drunk and the fire before which he sat.

Jack and Edgworth Bess had taken advantage of this state of things to have the little conversation with each other which we have already placed before the eyes of the reader.

The former had communicated to his companion the suspicions which the behaviour of the spy had engendered in his breast, and, as we are aware, had come to a tolerably correct conclusion concerning the whole matter.

Then, when Edgworth Bess, in a voice of the utmost terror, and almost ready to swoon, had asked him what they should do, Jack had replied, in tones of resolution, by twice uttering the word—

“Escape!”

That was, indeed, the only course open to them, but how were they to achieve such a feat?

Jack could not have told himself.

He was not blind to the difficulties and dangers in the way; he kept his eyes open to them all; but he would not permit them to be magnified, and so be the means of causing him unnecessary alarm.

He looked every one of them, as one might say, calmly in the face, and considered in what way he should be best able to overcome them.

In the first place, there was the man who was keeping watch.

In what way should he be dealt with?

It would seem as though, ere long, he would fall off into a deep sleep.

The coast would then be clear.

It was almost too much to hope for, though.

The man might struggle against slumber for a long time—so long that the prisoners would be unable to avail themselves of it in the manner intended.

He must be prevented from giving an alarm.

Jack Sheppard was little more than a moment in arriving at these conclusions.

His invention was fertile, and he quickly hit upon a plan of making this man secure.

Noticing that he was in a half-dozed, Jack abstracted from his pocket a quantity of rather thick twine.

He motioned to Edgworth Bess to remain still, and on no account to move.

The poor girl obeyed, and watched what he was about to do with anxious, wondering eyes.

Having selected a portion of the twine, which was several feet in length, he doubled it four times and twisted it.

This done, he gently changed his position.

He sank down until his body was on a level with the floor, and then cautiously crept forward like a snake.

He held the piece of twine in his hand.

He had not to creep more than a yard before he came to where the man was sitting.

His feet were close together upon the ground.

With great dexterity and caution Jack slipped the twine round his ankles.

In one end of it he made a running noose, so he was able to gradually draw it tight and then secure it.

Edgworth Bess watched him with bated breath and a beating heart, for she every moment dreaded that the man would wake up sufficiently to become aware of what Jack was about.

But he did not.

He moved uneasily now and then, and shifted his position slightly.

At such times as those Jack took care to remain profoundly still, and not to move in the least.

Presently his legs were firmly bound together, and then, with a triumphant expression on his countenance, Jack crept back to the side of his fair companion.

But he held his finger on his lip as a sign for her to remain silent.

He had done much, but he had a great deal more to do.

Emboldened, however, by his previous success, some more twine was selected.

A slip-knot was also made in this.

Jack now prepared to creep forward again.

Edgworth Bess seemed much terrified, and expressed as much by her gestures.

Jack, however, by a smile strove to reassure her, and made her a sign to give him a thick shawl which she wore round her shoulders.

Unable to imagine for whatever purpose this could be required, the girl, with looks of great curiosity, took it off and handed it to him.

Thus provided, Jack crept forward again.

But this time he did not go in a straight line to the half-sleeping sentinel.

On the contrary, he seemed to crawl away from him, but Edgworth Bess soon found out what were his intentions.

He was creeping round, so as to get behind him.

It seemed a weary time while he was doing this.

But Jack was cautious and stealthy in his movements, and consequently slow.

He was all but noiseless.

At length Jack was fairly at the back of the sleeping man.

Then he cautiously rose to his feet, until he stood at his full height behind him.

Jack had the thick shawl over his shoulder.

In both his hands he held the piece of twine, which was already in the form of a noose.

Gently, then, and scarcely breathing as he did so, Jack slipped the noose over the sentinel's head, and allowed it to descend until it was in such a position that, by drawing the knot tight, he should be able to bind the man's arms tight to his sides just above his elbows.

With his heart beating at a faster rate than usual, Jack proceeded to draw the string tight.

Bit by bit he drew it in, until at last, to his inexpressible satisfaction, he had the man secure.

To a great extent he was now powerless.

His hands and feet being secured in the manner we have described, it was out of the question that he should be able to do anything towards arresting their flight.

There was only one thing that he could do, and that was to raise the alarm by uttering an outcry.

But Jack Sheppard had not omitted that contingency in his calculations.

He had provided the thick shawl for the purpose of precluding all possibility of that.

Having done so much, and scarcely daring to draw his breath, Jack took the ends of the shawl in his hands, and, having folded it properly, with great swiftness put it over the man's head, and tied it tightly at the back.

It covered not only his mouth but his ears, and nose, and his eyes, thus depriving him at once of hearing, seeing, and speaking, and permitting him to breathe in only a limited manner.

No sooner was the shawl tied thus than the sentinel made a desperate effort to shout out and then to rise.

But in both of these, it may be said, he failed utterly, for his voice came no louder than a murmur, and on springing off his seat, he fell heavily on the ground.

No sound loud enough to attract attention or to cause an alarm followed this, and Jack Sheppard made a hasty

sign to Edgworth Bess to leave her crouched-up position by the side of the fire, and come towards him.

Trembling in every limb, and scarcely daring to breathe, the poor girl obeyed him.

She was terrified to a degree by the man Jack had so skilfully bound, and who continued to writhe and contort himself upon the floor in a manner quite astonishing to behold.

Edgworth Bess had been in an agony of terror during the whole of Jack's proceedings, and now she seemed as though her limbs would sink beneath her.

Jack saw the state of agitation she was in, and sprang forward to her assistance, but not until he had divested the sentinel—if such he could be called—of his sword and other defensive weapons.

Thus provided, Jack felt himself in a position to do battle with as many of the poor heiress's foes as chose to present themselves before him.

One arm encircled the persecuted girl's waist.

She leaned her head upon his shoulder and clung frantically to him with her arms.

But Jack reassured her, and spoke encouraging words, by which means he succeeded in calming her agitation.

Then he glanced coolly around him, and, as well as the faint fire-light would permit him, took in the general aspect of the place.

How he was to really escape from the mill and gain the open air, Jack had no definite idea.

But he meant to do it somehow or other, and, if he failed now, he might say farewell to ever succeeding at a future period.

He had noticed how the pirates had retired in all directions among the timber, and he was naturally afraid of encountering some of them, when, of course, an alarm would be immediately given.

It was quite in vain, though, that Jack tried to indicate the spot where he had entered by means of the little door, which was not visible from the interior.

The only thing he had to guide him was the direction which the spy had taken.

The gloom of the place was very great, and, after a momentary hesitation, Jack took a blazing brand from the fire, and determined, at all risks, to make use of it to aid him in his explorations.

He had nothing else about him which would answer his purpose.

With some little difficulty he persuaded his terrified companion to carry this light, but it was not until he told her the true reason of his wishing her to do so that she complied.

It was in order that Jack might still continue to hold his arm round her waist and support her steps, and so that he could have his right hand to grasp his sword, and so be in a position to defend himself from any attack that might be made upon them.

It was not until he had told her this that she complied, and then, struck with the obvious necessity of such a course, she took the extemporized torch, though her hand trembled so much as she held it that its extinguishment seemed imminent.

Slowly and silently Jack Sheppard now led the way across the strange underground apartment.

All was still.

It was evident that as yet no suspicions were excited.

The man by the fire, from some cause or other, had ceased his struggles and contortions.

Perhaps the shawl fitted just a little too closely over his nose and mouth.

Jack was not likely to trouble himself much about that.

The beams of wood, if they had been erected for the express purpose of confusing anybody, could not have been designed better for achieving that end.

When he passed among their mazy intricacies, Jack was fain to confess himself fairly bewildered.

But he pushed on, and presently, no less to his astonishment than his delight, he saw before him a rudely-made wooden door, which he concluded at once must be the one through which he had been dragged by his captors.

The reader must be kind enough to remember that Bess did not recover from her swoon until she was placed beside the fire they had just left, so, of course, she had not the remotest knowledge of the route by which she had been brought to that subterraneous region.

But with Jack Sheppard the case was entirely different.

To be sure his intellect was somewhat confused in consequence of the heavy blow he had received on the top of his head, but still he was sufficiently in possession of his senses to take notice of everything.

He knew, therefore, that, should this prove to be the door through which he had been brought, he should find a passage on the other side of it, and, at the further end of the passage a flight of steps leading up to the little door by the side of the mill, where a man had sat on guard.

With these facts fresh in his mind, Jack had some data to go upon.

A glance at this door showed him that the fastenings upon it were of the commonest description.

It gave him not the least trouble to open.

He passed through quickly, taking his companion with him.

Then he closed the door.

Edgworth Bess held up the firebrand as high as she could, so as to diffuse its light as much as possible, and by the aid of this Jack saw he was in a passage which, so far as he could tell, was the very one through which he had formerly passed.

He said as much to Edgworth Bess, and then added—

"If this is so, dearest, I must leave you here a moment with the light while I creep forward in the darkness and reconnoitre. Do not be afraid to stay; I shall soon be back, and shall not run into any danger. For our mutual safety I implore you to do this."

Thus adjured, Bess could not refuse compliance, although she would have gladly done so.

Had she known of the sentinel at the top of the steps, she would not have given her consent.

But, happily, she was ignorant of it.

Again imploring her not to move upon any account, but to keep quite still for a moment close to the door, Jack Sheppard, with the stealthy and noiseless tread of a Red Indian, crept along the passage in the direction of the flight of steps.

With straining eyes, Edgworth Bess looked after him until he became invisible.

CHAPTER CCLXX.

JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE RUINED MILL, BUT NOT WITHOUT INCURRING GREAT DANGER.

JACK SHEPPARD was fully impressed with the necessity and importance of ascertaining whether there was still a sentinel at the top of the steps.

If there was not, well and good. His course would then be clear and open before him. But, if there was? What then?

Simply this.

He must be effectually prevented from detaining the escaping prisoners, and also from giving the alarm to his slumbering comrades.

And it was in anticipation of this latter alternative that Jack had crept forward in the manner we have described, leaving Edgworth Bess half-fainting with terror at the end of the passage farthest from the steps.

Jack's heart was stern and firm.

He was determined that no single man, let him be whom he might, should stand between him and freedom.

He found the bottom of the flight of steps easily enough, and commenced the ascent with even more caution than he had yet displayed.

Up—up he went—trusting to find the man sleeping at his post, because, if he did so, he should, in all probability, be spared the necessity of taking his life.

The staircase was a great height, much higher than he thought it was, but then it would seem so to Jack, for he paused at every stair he ascended.

No sound, however, of any kind came upon his ears.

But he did not abate his caution in any way.

At length Jack heard a faint sound.

He stopped instantly.

It was as though some one had moved.

The place was in the profoundest darkness, so, of course, he could see nothing.

He had only his ears to depend upon.

The faint sound was as though some one near him had moved.

The next moment he heard some words muttered in a low and half-sleepy tone.

The sentinel was, then, at his post.

Jack drew in his breath, and set his teeth hard together.

He now became conscious that the place was gradually getting lighter, and he could not at first account for the phenomenon.

The illumination was very faint, and would scarcely have been apparent to any but one who had for some time been in total darkness.

The light came through the various chinks, and slits, and cracks that were in the sides of the ruined mill.

But, dim as the light was, it enabled Jack to see about him.

He proceeded now with much greater confidence, and, after mounting a few more steps, he was able to distinguish the outlines of a man.

He was seated in a huddled-up sort of fashion, and was, to all appearances, asleep.

He had probably been partially aroused by some slight noise made by Jack in his ascent, and then dropped off to sleep again.

Jack was yet in hopes that he should be able to approach him unperceived.

But in this he was mistaken.

No sooner had he got close to the top of the staircase than the sentinel started to his feet.

In another moment he would have given the alarm.

But Jack, seeing the imminent danger of discovery with which he was threatened, made one bound forward, and clutched the sentinel tightly round the throat with his left hand.

With his right he flashed the sword before his eyes, and in a suppressed voice he said—

“Utter a word, or make the least resistance, and I will assuredly run you through with this sword.”

The man heard the words.

He happened, however, to be possessed of a courageous spirit, for he paid no heed to them whatever, but, without speaking a word, he seized Jack with both hands, and twisted his leg round his foe's.

Then, giving himself the necessary impulse, he fell backwards, of course carrying Jack with him, who was completely taken by surprise by the suddenness with which the manœuvre was performed.

Jack dropped the sword, for in such close quarters it would be of little service.

He would do better with his right hand at liberty.

A desperate struggle now commenced.

Jack still retained the firm clutch he had taken of the man's throat, who, though he strove to shout for aid, found himself unable to do so.

Inarticulate murmurs only came from his lips.

Over and over they rolled upon the floor, each of them instinctively keeping away from the staircase.

The place upon which the struggle took place was very limited in its area, and more than once the combatants overhung the staircase in an alarming manner.

Jack Sheppard found that the man to whom he was opposed was much his superior in size and strength.

But he would not allow this disadvantage to daunt him.

The struggle might be a protracted one, but he determined not to yield.

They now rose partly to their feet, still grappling with each other.

Jack put forth his utmost strength, determined to make one great and final effort.

He pressed the man backwards.

But he did not know how close he was to the steep staircase.

As he pressed the man back he overbalanced, and the two, still holding one another in a desperate grip, rolled headlong down, their bodies striking with a sickening crash against the steps and against the sides of the mill. The bottom was reached in an incredibly short space of time.

With a tremendous crash, which seemed to shake the building from its roof to its foundations, the combatants fell upon the floor, and lay there without either of them exhibiting the least signs of life or motion.

A piercing shriek came from the lips of Edgworth Bess as they fell down.

Unable to restrain her impatience, she had disobeyed Jack's injunctions not to move from the door, and had, step by step, made her way along the passage in the direction of the stairs.

Upon reaching here, however, she fortunately did not attempt to ascend, but stood listening.

Faintly came to her ears the sound of the conflict going on above.

Then the two bodies came tumbling down.

Instinctively she drew back, and the scream came from her lips when she recognised Jack.

That scream had both a good and bad effect.

It awoke Jack from the state of half-insensibility which his fearful fall had produced, and he sprang quickly to his feet.

But it also awoke the echoes of that subterranean place, and rang with remarkable distinctness in the ears of the slumbering pirates, who, one and all, sprang to their feet with a confused consciousness that something was amiss.

Upon uttering the scream, and seeing Jack spring to his feet, Edgworth Bess felt all her strength suddenly leave her—a mist floated before her eyes, and she fell backwards into a swoon.

Luckily Jack saw what was about to happen, and he sprang forward and caught her just before she reached the ground.

The man at the bottom of the staircase, although the injuries he had received were very much greater than those sustained by Jack, began to show unequivocal signs of returning animation.

From the rear, too, came fierce shouts and cries, the clashing of weapons, and the trampling of feet, all telling that the pirates were thoroughly aroused.

Jack's position was a perilous one.

Not for a moment, however, did he lose his presence of mind.

All would depend upon the next few minutes.

He had powerful incentives for him to make every exertion.

Raising the inanimate form of Edgworth Bess in his arms, he made a dash towards the staircase, trampling down again to the earth his late antagonist.

He was just in time, for the door was flung open, and the pirates in a body rushed into the passage.

They were all well armed, and most of them carried lights.

They were, however, in a state of great indecision, for not one of them could take upon themselves to say precisely what was the matter.

Jack's strength was quite inadequate to the task of carrying Edgworth Bess up the steep flight of stairs.

He knew it, and every moment he felt as though his legs were giving way beneath him, and that he was falling down.

But the desperate nature of his situation, and the nature of the peril in which he was placed, nerved him with strength of a fictitious character, which made him equal to the emergency.

Up he went.

He staggered from side to side.

He halted now and then.

But still he kept upwards—upwards, until the little landing-place close to the sliding panel was reached.

Here he halted, and drew his breath painfully.

He wiped the clustering drops of perspiration from his face.

Just then his foot struck against something.

It rang with a metallic sound.

Jack knew what it was, and, with a joyful cry upon his lips, he stooped and picked it up.

It was the sword which he had dropped a little while before.

He made one slashing cut with it at the little sliding panel which intervened between him and the daylight.

The cut was an effective one.

The panel sunk down in a moment.

Quick as thought he passed through, taking his insensible burden with him.

But the pirates, now conscious that their two prisoners were escaping, and knowing what dangerous information they possessed, were crowding up the staircase, anxious to recapture them at all hazards, alive or dead, though they would have preferred the former.

But Jack had the start.

How he got down the crazy, ricketty ladder on the outside, Jack never exactly knew.

But he was conscious he reached the bottom, and at that moment the idea darted into his head that he had the means at his disposal of impeding the pursuit of the pirates, and that for a considerable period.

What more easy than, with a few vigorous slashes with his sword, to cut away the frail and ruinous ladder?

Without stopping a second to reflect upon this matter, he allowed Edgworth Bess to slide out of his arms on to the ground, and, with the agility of a squirrel, he ran up the steps again.

When he had ascended about half of them, he saw the heads of the pirates appear at the aperture.

The foremost of them gained the ladder and commenced the descent.

To be of any real good, he must be speedy in his actions.

He swung the sword round his head, and brought it down on one side of the staircase.

The woodwork was severed at a single blow.

One more blow on the other side completed the work of demolition, for the extra weight upon the top assisted him in a great measure.

There was a sudden crackling sound, and then, with a crash, which mingled with the cries that came from the lips of the pirates, the upper half of the staircase gave way, and those who were upon it were violently precipitated to the ground.

With the quickness of thought, Jack, finding himself so completely successful, descended the steps again.

In another moment he was by the side of Edgworth Bess.

The change of position and the fresh cool air had recovered her from her swoon.

She knew Jack instantly, and clung to him tightly.

As yet recollection had not fully come back to her, and she did not realize her position.

Jack Sheppard caught her up in his arms.

Turning round, he saw at the aperture near the top of the old mill, a crowd of anxious, bloodthirsty-looking faces.

He must have been seen by them, for a volley was fired.

Happily, without inflicting any injury either upon him or his companion.

Those pirates who had fallen to the ground along with the ladder, lay just where they had chanced to drop, incapable of motion.

Jack turned and fled.

To his great satisfaction he found that a dense mist had risen from the river and overspread the land.

It increased in thickness and opacity every moment.

A more favourable occurrence than this could not well have happened to him, because he should be able to get out of sight of his foes so much sooner.

In less time than one could have deemed possible, the mill was entirely out of sight.

A gush of joy came over his heart when he became conscious that he had really escaped—that he had succeeded in saving himself and the poor heiress from the frightful peril which menaced her.

His voice was faint and almost inarticulate, but he managed to keep repeating in the ears of Edgworth Bess—

"We have escaped—we have escaped!"

The poor girl heard him, and clung to his neck without fully comprehending the purport of the words he addressed to her, and yet she knew that, for the present, they were really out of danger.

Jack staggered more than once, but still he kept bravely on.

Suddenly, and before he was aware of it, he found himself close to the water's edge.

He would probably have walked into the river, for the mist was so thick that he could not see its surface, only his attention was attracted by a voice saying, in hoarse tones—

"Boat—boat, your honour? Want a boat? I'll take you to London-bridge for a shilling. Boat, your honour, boat? Take the boat? I want to get back to London, but not empty-handed. Only a shilling. Will you go, sir?"

"Yes," said Jack faintly; "yes. To London-bridge. You shall be well paid for your trouble."

CHAPTER CCLXXI.

EDGORTH BESS AND JACK SHEPPARD REACH LONDON BRIDGE IN SAFETY.

JUST for a few moments we will leave Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, and return to Jonathan Wild.

The reader will understand, then, that it was about a couple of hours after the occurrence of the incidents which we have just described that Jonathan Wild and his band arrived at the old mill.

By that time the pirates, who deemed it futile to look for the two escaped prisoners in the mist now that they had once lost sight of them, had repaired the damage Jack had done.

Some of those within the mill descended to the foundation, and returned with a rope, which they fastened securely to the structure, and used as a means of reaching the ground.

Being sailors, they were able to slip down the rope without any trouble.

Two men had fallen with the fragment of the ladder, and the fall had injured them seriously, so much so that they were unable to move hand or foot.

The rage of the pirates at this defeat knew no bounds.

The pirate captain, however, was a man who always took care to make the best of a bad job.

Instead of uselessly raving about his misfortune, he called his men together and told them to repair the staircase in such a manner that no suspicion should be excited by any one who might chance to notice its altered condition.

The men set about this labour cheerfully enough, because they were well aware that the safety of their haunt depended entirely upon its being kept a secret.

Hence was it, that upon the arrival of Jonathan Wild and the spy about two hours afterwards, no trace was left of what had taken place.

The staircase had been restored, and as soon as this was over the captain had recompensed their labour and atoned for the bruises they might have received by broaching a cask, and inviting them to a general carouse.

To this they immediately consented, because it was congenial to their feelings, and they were in the height of their glee when the door, which they fancied so secure, was burst open, and the much-dreaded thief-taker, Jonathan Wild, rushed into the apartment.

In a previous chapter we have minutely related what took place after Jonathan's sudden irruption—how the pirates had been vanquished and the greater part of them taken prisoners, and how the pirate captain had expired through the injuries he had received, after communicating to Wild the important and unexpected intelligence that the two prisoners had escaped.

How and when the captain did not live long enough to inform him, and we have seen how Jonathan, with that energy which formed so prominent a trait in his disposition, had set about searching the foundations of the mill.

That the search could have but one result, and that an unsuccessful one, so far as the thief-taker's interests were concerned, the reader must already be aware; for which reason it would be tedious and unnecessary to give a lengthened account of Wild's proceedings, since the ultimate result of them must be known.

Let it suffice to say that, after a long and minute search, he was obliged to admit his failure, and come to the conclusion that his prey had again escaped him, though he was unwilling in the extreme to do so.

Such being the case, he called his men together and mounted his own steed.

Then at the head of his band and his prisoners, he moodily made his way back to London.

He spoke but few words for he was busy with his thoughts.

In a most unexpected manner, almost the whole of his stolen treasure had come back to him.

Then there was the piratical crew he had prisoners.

He quickly made up his mind what to do with them.

He would lodge them in prison and appear against them, when he would be able to give such an exaggerated and glowing description of the manner in which they had been captured, that everybody who heard it

would be deluded into the idea that he was the most wonderful police-officer that ever existed.

His plans were settled with them so far, and he justly calculated by doing this that he should blind the eyes of the authorities to the various little irregularities in his conduct which might have come under their notice.

And this it is that chiefly accounts for the length of time Jonathan was permitted to carry on his depre-datory operations.

Then the government was at that time notoriously the most corrupt that ever had or has existed—which the reader must recollect is saying a great deal—and these unworthy administrators felt the want of an unscrupulous agent like Jonathan Wild.

They made him their tool in many a dark and nefarious transaction, until at length they were placed in his power and afraid to take any very energetic proceedings against him, for fear that by so doing he should in revenge disclose certain particulars which would inevitably bring ruin upon them.

Fortunately, such a state of things could not now possibly exist, though the country was threatened with something almost as bad a short time since.

Jonathan Wild was an excellent tactician, however, but then he was one who never troubled much about what he did.

He managed to keep in with the government, with the opposition, and with the people at large, though of course there were a great many acquainted with his enormities, but they could not make themselves heard against the redoubtable thief-taker.

But his monstrous villainies had now reached their culminating point, as succeeding events will quickly show.

While upon the subject of the Thames pirates, we may as well refer to their ultimate fate, which will save all further trouble.

In due time they were brought up for trial, and were found guilty upon the testimony of Jonathan Wild, who, "from information he had received," had attacked them in their secret haunt, and, after a desperate conflict, had succeeded in vanquishing them, and taking them into custody.

They were found guilty, of course, and a few days afterwards executed at Tyburn, very much to the advantage and popularity of Jonathan Wild.

We must now request the reader to return with us while we describe the remainder of the proceedings of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess upon that eventful evening.

The sound of the man's voice asking him whether he wanted a boat, came most welcome upon the ears of Jack Sheppard, who was scarcely cognizant of anything save the fact that he was staggering somewhere with his burden.

The voice, however, and the words it uttered, completely restored him to consciousness, and in faint tones he managed to gasp out a request that he should be taken to London-bridge, coupled with the assurance that the waterman should be well paid for his trouble.

This was enough.

The boatman, who had come down there from London-bridge with a fare, was anxious to return, but, at the same time, he did not wish to go empty-handed.

He would have been glad to take Jack for a very small sum, but when he heard him offer to pay a liberal fare, he was most alacrious.

He jumped out of the boat, and came towards Jack.

"I am hurt," gasped Jack, in a still fainter voice, for he felt that all his strength was leaving him. "I am hurt, and this young girl has fainted, take her with you."

"No," replied Edgworth Bess, struggling to her feet.

"I have recovered now. Where are we now, Jack?"

"Never mind, dearest. Be content—th this amount of knowledge—you are in safety."

"Thank heaven."

The boatman assisted the poor girl into the boat, and Jack followed as well as he could.

He had the greatest difficulty in keeping himself from falling into a swoon.

"Push off," he said to the boatman; "and the sooner you reach your destination the better."

"All right, sir; but I shall have to be careful. Do you see what a thick fog there is upon the river? It

would be no joke for us to run foul of any craft larger than ourselves."

Jack Sheppard looked around him as the boatman spoke, and probably, for the first time, noticed that so dense a vapour hung upon the water that they could not see a boat's length before them.

To navigate the river under such circumstances would require the exercise of very great skill and caution, for that part of the Thames was always thronged with various vessels riding at anchor, and he would have to thread his way through their intricacies.

"By all means be careful," said Jack, as he saw the danger with which they were threatened. "Be careful by all means. I am afraid you will have much ado to avoid a collision."

"Leave that to me, sir. If you will be content to sit apart a little, and allow me to have my own way, I shall be all right."

Jack had no objection to this course, so he at once turned his attention to Edgworth Bess.

He found she was sobbing and crying bitterly.

That, however, was but the reaction produced by the various and violent excitements she had undergone.

Jack spoke to her, and she soon grew calmer.

"We have escaped from the pirates, and are beyond all reach of their pursuit. We are now in a boat upon the Thames, and, ere long, I trust we shall reach London-bridge."

"Oh! Jack, how comforting to hear those words. Are you sure you are not deceiving me?"

"Deceiving you?"

"I mean, I hope you are not trying to make out that things are better than they really are."

"No, indeed I am not."

"Then I rejoice. But, Jack, your voice is faint, and your breathing laboured. You are hurt. I am sure you are hurt, Jack. Tell me at once."

"I am shaken a little."

"Oh! I recollect now; I had forgotten it. There was that fearful fall down the steep flight of steps. Is it possible you live? I made sure it had killed you."

"Yes, I live, dearest. I am bruised and sadly knocked about, but a little rest will soon put that all right."

"I trust so, but I fear your injuries are greater than you would like to confess them to be."

"No—no; do not think that, dearest. But I am not one to sink under a hurt, or to make more of it than I ought."

"Nor enough. But, Jack, where are we now?"

"Somewhere on the Thames. I have hired this man to take us to London-bridge."

"But do you see how thick the fog is? I cannot see a couple of yards around us. How is the waterman to find his way?"

"That is his business. I have little doubt he will be able to steer clear of all obstacles."

"I hope so; but, Jack."

"What, dear one?"

"You said we were going to London-bridge."

"Yes."

"What shall we do there?"

"I have scarcely thought yet. We must consider."

"What made you think of London-bridge at all?"

"I did not think of it."

"Not think of it?"

"No. After we got out of the mill we were pursued, and I caught you up in my arms and ran as fast as I was able. The fog was dense, as you see it now. Moreover, I felt myself dizzy and blinded, and I was scarcely conscious of where I was going. Suddenly I was hailed by this waterman. His voice recalled me to myself. I then found I had ran to the river's brink. He called to me, and asked me whether I wanted to go to London-bridge. Can you imagine how readily I seized upon this chance of escape?"

"Oh! yes, Jack, I understand all now quite well. Alas! what an evil fate is ours. We seem doomed to nothing but trouble and misfortune. Surely after all this strife and danger there will come a long period of repose."

"I hope so, dearest—indeed I hope so, for I feel almost sick at heart at these perpetual struggles against adverse destiny. Were it not for you I should have succumbed long ago."

"Do not talk of failure, Jack. Consider what we had better do upon our arrival at London-bridge."

"I should like to find Blueskin."

"But where is he?"

"I have no idea. I have not seen him since he landed at Westminster."

"I fear he must have fallen into the hands of the villain Wild."

"That is what I dread."

"And I, too."

"But we must not give up. We must try to find him. On many an occasion he has proved himself a match for Jonathan Wild, and I am not altogether without a hope that he has succeeded in escaping from him."

"How shall you ascertain whether he is Wild's prisoner?"

"That is the difficulty, but if we think the matter over, doubtless some idea will suggest itself to us."

"The treasure has gone," said Edgworth Bess, after a pause.

"I know it. Fain would I have carried that away with me, but, alas! it was impossible. We were all but recaptured as it was."

"I must have been insensible nearly the whole of the time, for my remembrance of what took place is exceedingly confused."

"You were insensible for a long time. Perhaps it was all for the best."

"We will try to think so. But, you know I said we have lost the treasure?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the effect of that loss? We are penniless."

"We are, for those rascally pirates took everything valuable we had about us."

"They did. I have a purse in my bosom with a little money in it, but that is all."

"It is better than nothing, at any rate. We shall be able to pay this man his fare."

"But what are we to do? How are we to escape Wild without money?"

"We must do the best we can. If we can find Blueskin, I have no doubt all will be well."

At this moment the waterman cried out—

"London-bridge, your honour. London-bridge. Here we are safe now, your honour."

The keel of the boat grated on the shore at the bottom of the steps, for it was low tide.

Jack gave the man a liberal fare, and then assisted his companion to land.

Hand in hand they ascended the steps, and directly afterwards stood upon old London-bridge, uncertain which way to turn.

CHAPTER CCLXXII.

BLUESKIN RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY MEETS WITH JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS.

TURN we now to the proceedings of Blueskin, who we left in rather a peculiar situation.

He was seated in the post-chaise with the young girl who he had saved from a fate that was ten times worse than death itself, and he had just finished listening to the story of her wrongs when the vehicle came to a sudden halt.

What could be the cause of this he was at a loss to think, but, dreading the occurrence of some fresh misfortune, he let down the window of the post-chaise and projected his head through it.

He was unable to see anything in the shape of an obstruction, as he had quite expected.

"Hullo, coachman!" he cried. "What is the meaning of this?"

But no one replied, and, upon looking round him Blueskin found himself in a very strange place indeed.

The reader will doubtless recollect that when Blueskin entered the post-chaise along with the young girl, he had tied his horse to the back part of the vehicle, and directed the coachman to drive towards London, saying that he would presently give him the address to which he was to go.

He had compelled the coachman by threats to mount the box and to drive on.

Then he became so deeply interested in the narrative

which the young girl related to him, that he quite forgot to look in what direction they were going, or whether they passed any familiar objects upon the road.

That was very near becoming a fatal oversight.

The driver, who was deep in the confidence of his rascally employer, and who was well aware of all the particulars of the transaction, made up his mind before going very far to try whether he could not drive to his original destination, and reach it before the inmates were aware of what he was about.

He put his intention into practice, and instead of going where Blueskin had ordered him, drove to the house where the squire was waiting for his panderer and his victim.

It was a house on the outskirts of London, surrounded by grounds of considerable extent.

He drove through the lodge gates unquestioned, because the arrival of the post-chaise was expected.

The gates were closed again and fastened up for the night.

The carriage-drive up to the house was as wide, or nearly so, as an ordinary road, and was bordered on both sides by tall trees.

Along this, then, the carriage rolled, Blueskin being all the time unconscious of where he was going.

Then, as we have related, the chaise stopped.

The moment it came to a standstill the coachman descended from the box with perhaps more agility than he ever had in his life before, and running round to the back of the vehicle, untied Blueskin's horse, and sent him off at a gallop over a spacious lawn.

His hoofs made no sound upon the soft turf, so Blueskin was quite unconscious of it.

The coachman, considering he had made things as secure as lay in his power, ran towards the house, the front door of which was thrown open before he could reach it, thus indicating with tolerable plainness that the chaise had been heard to stop.

This was what Blueskin saw when he put his head out of the chaise window.

Before him a house, the outlines of which could be only imperfectly distinguished, and from the open door of which there came a bright light.

He saw, too, several persons standing on the threshold.

Around him he could see the spacious grounds belonging to the residence in front.

He comprehended all in a moment.

He was angry with himself for having been so incautious.

It was time, however, for prompt action if he wished to yet save the young girl who had put faith in his powers to aid her, and if he wished to escape with his own life, for he rightly enough judged that those who would abduct a young and innocent girl, would not stop short at any means, however desperate, of achieving their ends.

Without staying any longer than it took him to give a hasty glance around and comprehend his position, Blueskin turned the handle of the chaise door and sprang out on to the ground.

He called to the young girl to follow him, and he assisted her to alight.

Those persons who had appeared at the front door now uttered loud cries, and came running with hostile manifestations towards the chaise.

Blueskin, recollecting his horse, ran to the back where he had fastened it.

His design was to mount, taking the girl on the saddle with him, and effecting an immediate retreat, for single-handed he could have had no chance against the numbers opposed to him.

To his dismay he discovered that the horse was gone.

How was he to escape?

There was no time to answer the question, for about half-a-dozen men were close to him.

The young girl, although she did not thoroughly comprehend her danger, yet understood enough of it to be aware that she had much to dread, so she clung with terrified tightness to Blueskin's arm.

"Fly—fly!" she said. "Oh! fly."

"A good thought," said Blueskin. "We will escape them yet. Be of good cheer, and all will be well. Keep hold of my hand, and run with all the speed you are capable of."

The young girl did not need telling twice to do this, and she bounded forward at a pace that Blueskin found rather difficult to keep up with.

He directed his course to the nearest clump of trees, because, not only would their intricacies hide him to a considerable extent from the view of his pursuers, but he should have a much better chance of getting clear.

The distance to the trees was but short, and Blueskin and his young companion were soon among them.

With the speed of hunted hares they made their way among them, and not without sustaining many injuries of a trifling character.

The young girl required no urging forward. Terror lent her speed.

The cries of those in pursuit reached their ears with a great deal too much plainness to be at all agreeable.

"Close the gates," they heard them cry. "Close the gates, and then they cannot escape."

This sounded very discouraging, but Blueskin would not let it daunt him, nor did he feel inclined to take it for granted that because the gates were shut he should be unable to escape.

Suddenly Blueskin came to the other side of the trees, and then he saw before him what looked like a tastefully laid out garden, which was bounded by a high brick wall.

Towards this he unhesitatingly directed his course.

Upon a near approach, however, he saw with dismay that the wall was of such a height as to justify his pursuers in saying that if the gates were shut they could not escape.

How he was to get over that wall with his companion he had not the remotest idea.

Still he ran on.

Looking back, he saw that none of his pursuers were in sight.

Probably they were not aware the fugitives had emerged from the clump of trees.

A little more than a moment brought Blueskin and his companion to it.

He glanced up at it.

It was ten feet high at the very least.

He looked to the right and left along it, but nowhere did it appear to be an inch lower.

In the hope that they should find some such place, where the difficulty of surmounting the wall would not be so great, he caught hold of the breathless girl by the hand, and ran with her along the wall, keeping close in the shadow of it, and trampling beds of rare and beautiful flowers remorselessly beneath their feet.

Suddenly in her progress the young girl caught her foot against something, stumbled, and almost fell, but fortunately Blueskin was just in time to save her.

She was hurt, and burst into tears.

But those tears soon changed from tears of pain to tears of joy, for Blueskin, on looking down on the ground to see what it was she had stumbled over, found it was a ladder.

Here, then, and by such an extraordinary chance, the means of making their escape was presented to them.

Quick as thought, Blueskin raised the ladder against the wall.

"Up—up!" he cried to the weeping girl. "Ascend, I will follow you. Quick—quick! and we shall be free. It is our only chance."

The young girl scarcely required urging.

She mounted the ladder, and Blueskin ascended it after her, for the double purpose of keeping it steady and saving her from a fall.

But by this time the men in pursuit appeared in the garden.

They were provided with lanterns, and carried weapons of various descriptions in their hands.

Without hurry the girl was able to reach the top of the wall, and here she had to wait a moment while Blueskin drew the ladder up after them, not only to prevent their feet making use of it, but in order to descend the opposite side of the wall.

The ladder was a light short one, such as might be used by a gardener, and the probability was it had been left where Blueskin luckily found it by the man who had charge of attending to the plants.

Our friend drew the ladder up easily enough, and lowered it on the other side of the wall.

It was long enough to reach to the top.

He then bade the young girl descend.

This was rather difficult, and by the time she had fairly got her foot upon the first round, the men who were in chase were close to the wall.

Blueskin pressed her to hasten her descent, so that he might follow her.

The men, however, cried—

"Surrender—surrender! Come down! Come down at once, or John, the gamekeeper, will fire his double-barrelled gun, and blow you to bits! Come down at once."

Of course, Blueskin paid not the slightest attention to this speech, but endeavoured to get out of the range of the gun, for fear John, the gamekeeper, should really favour him with the contents of its two barrels.

Seeing what he was about, those below cried—

"Fire! fire! John, make haste, or they will escape. Don't be afraid; the master will see you all right."

John, the gamekeeper, raised the gun to his shoulder and pulled both the triggers at once.

The report was tremendous, and the recoil of the weapon threw him backwards to the ground.

Blueskin saw him raise the gun, and felt that he had but two alternatives.

Either to stay where he was and risk the effect of the shot, or drop off the wall into the road and chance receiving a few bruises.

He chose the latter alternative, so, letting go his grasp, he fell to the ground.

He was only just in time.

Indeed, he could scarcely make out whether he was hit or not.

So sudden, too, was his fall that the men set up a shout and declared he was killed.

But such indeed was very far from being the case.

Blueskin was worth a good many dead ones yet.

He rose to his feet, and then found that the injuries he had received were comparatively trifling when all things were taken into consideration.

The young girl uttered a loud scream and let go her hold of the ladder, for she fell into the same mistake as the men—namely, that Blueskin had been killed, or at all events fatally injured.

Without him to assist her she felt that she was lost indeed.

What a joyful and pleasant surprise it must have been to her, therefore, when she heard him say—

"Fear nothing; I am unhurt. All is well so far. Rise—follow me. If we are quick in our movements we may yet escape our pursuers."

"You are sure you are not wounded?"

"Quite sure. I had to let go my hold of the top of the wall in order to save myself, and all the harm I have received is that which I have sustained by falling on to the ground, and I call that nothing. Come, or you will be too late."

Gladly did the young girl comply with his request when she found her preserver was not injured, and once more hand in hand they ran along with the greatest speed they were able to make.

They found themselves in the high-road, and Blueskin, without hesitating a moment as to which course they ought to take, turned towards London, from which he was not very distant.

They both ran on until failing breath and failing limbs compelled them to moderate their pace.

Finally they subsided into a walk.

Blueskin looked long and carefully behind him, and listened intently, but by neither of these means could he learn anything of the movements of their foes, so he, with some reason, came to the conclusion that they had distanced them.

But, if so, there was no time for delay. They might take horse and follow them, in which case they would inevitably be overtaken.

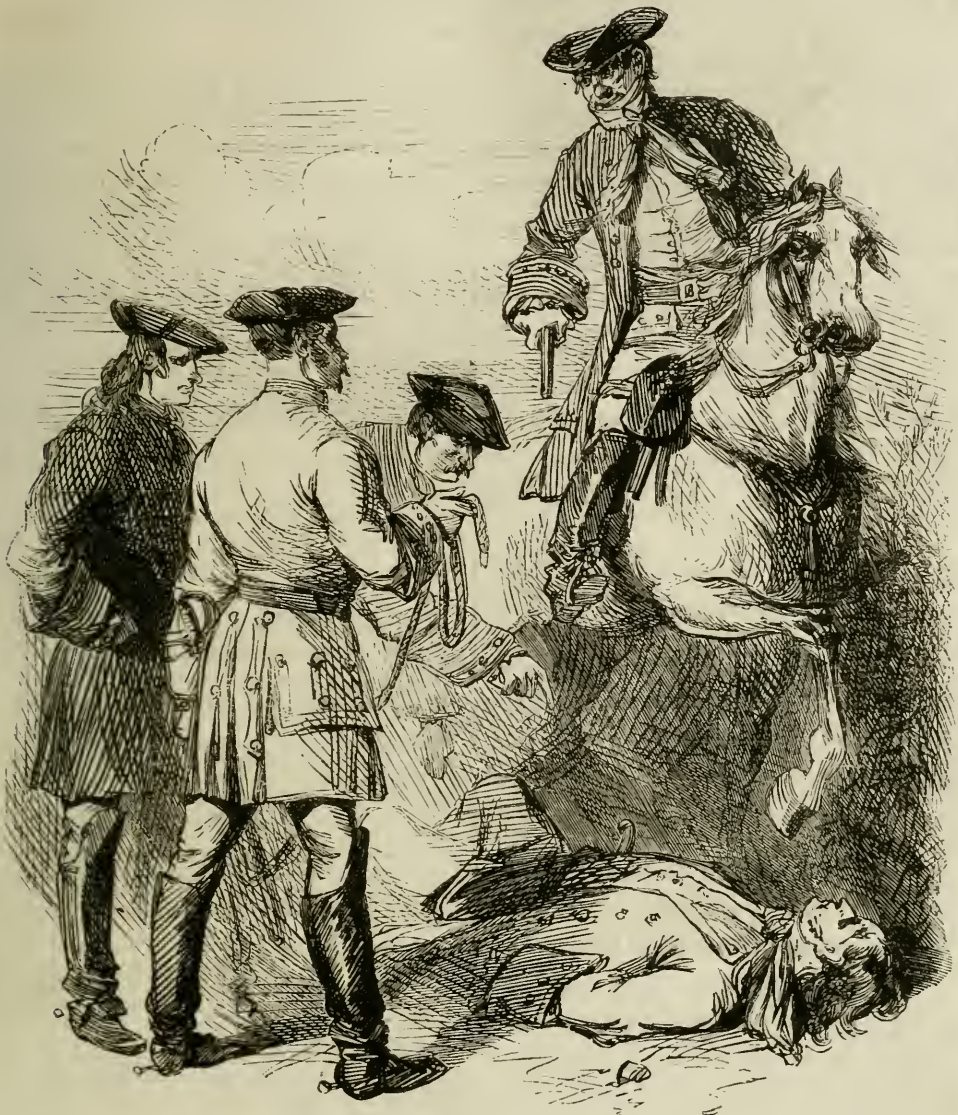
So Blueskin urged his companion forward.

The poor girl was almost exhausted, but she kept up bravely.

At length the City-road was gained, without any hindrance from their pursuers.

As soon as she reached this thoroughfare, the young girl glanced around her, and then immediately pointed out the street to which she wished to be taken.

Blueskin accompanied her, and knocked at the door of a house of a rather squalid exterior.



[THE CAPTURE OF BLUESKIN BY JONATHAN WILD AND HIS MYRMIDONS.]

The inmates were all in bed, but, at length, he had the satisfaction of seeing the door opened, and the girl received by her relatives with every manifestation of pleasure.

To their pressing request to stay Blueskin replied that important business required his immediate attention, and that he had already sacrificed more time than he could well spare.

They urged him no more.

Hastily bidding them farewell, and with the pleasant feeling about his heart which the knowledge of having done good invariably produces, Blueskin dismissed the incident almost entirely from his mind, and directed the whole of his thoughts to a consideration of his own position.

He had failed to do what he had determined upon, namely, to follow Jonathan Wild.

Now where was he to look for his two companions in misfortune, Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess?

CHAPTER CCLXXIII.

JONATHAN WILD MISSES HIS PREY BY A HAIR'S BREADTH.

PERHAPS at that very moment, he thought, and the reflection was maddening in the extreme, they might be attacked by Wild, and unable to defend themselves any longer against him, when, if he was there, the aspect of affairs would be completely altered.

The interposition of his strong arm might save them from death or capture.

But what trace or clue had he to their whereabouts? What hope could he have of meeting with them?

None whatever.

In a despairing sort of way he turned round and round upon his heels, uncertain which way to take.

To him all roads appeared to be alike.

Little did Blueskin imagine the real facts of the case, and, though he pictured his two companions in trouble, how far did the imagination fall short of the reality.

At length Blueskin, who felt that no good could be done by remaining in such a state of indecision on that spot, turned towards London.

At that lone and silent hour of the night all the streets were deserted. It was only now and then, and at long intervals that he met a pedestrian, hurrying along as though his life depended upon his speed.

The state of Blueskin's mind is quite indescribable. Knowing as we do that he has the interests both of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess at heart, we can only faintly conceive his mental confusion and dismay.

From the words which he had heard Jonathan Wild utter when that worthy set out upon his expedition, he came to the conclusion that Jack and Bess were not yet in his power; and still those words might not have had reference to them at all, but to some other persons whose capture the thief-taker desired.

Perplexed, bewildered, completely lost in a maze of thought, Blueskin continued on his way.

He had paid little or no attention to the route he had taken. He was aware that he had walked a long way, and that he was still in London, but that was all.

Suddenly he looked around him, in order to ascertain his precise position.

Somewhat to his surprise, he found himself on old London-bridge.

Seeing this, he thought in a moment that it was higher up the Thames that he had lost his companions, and with a slower step he walked across the bridge to one of the embrasures in the parapet, from which a view of the river can be obtained.

As in the present structure, there were seats in these embrasures where those who were tired could sit down.

When he entered the one nearest to him, Blueskin noticed that two persons were seated in it who shrunk back into the shadow as soon as he made his appearance.

It was very dark, and there were few objects which could be distinctly seen.

He mounted on to the seat, and, standing upon it, leant his arms upon the stonework and looked over the water.

It was while thus occupied—straining his eyes vainly over the dark surface of the water, that he was startled by hearing one of the two persons speak he had noticed occupying the embrasure before he entered it.

It was not, however, the words which produced the effect upon him, for they were uttered in too low a voice for their import to reach him.

It was the tones of the voice.

He recognised them.

By no movement, however, or other sign, did he betray his recognition.

He kept profoundly still, bending all his faculties into the one of hearing.

Faintly he heard the two persons speaking, and though he could only just catch a word or two here and there, he was quite sure he knew the voices of both the persons who were conversing.

And then, to set all doubts at rest, he heard his own name pronounced.

The reader understands all.

When we last left Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, after their rather perilous journey in the little wherry, they ascended the slippery stone steps, and at length stood upon London-bridge.

Which way they were to turn they knew not.

Edgworth Bess, too, felt tired and weary.

That they must come to an understanding of some kind was quite evident, and it was Jack who proposed that they should both sit down in the first embrasure they came to and recover themselves somewhat from the exertion they had undergone, and at the same time arrange some definite plan of action.

This they did.

It was while they were engaged in this manner that they were startled by the entrance of a man, who, however, appeared to take no notice of them, but got upon the seat as far away from them as he could.

That man was Blueskin.

How strange a chance it was that he should have found them in this manner.

He was sure it was their voices, and yet it seemed so impossible that he could not do otherwise than doubt.

So he remained for some moments after he recognised

them like one who fears to move lest an illusion should be dispelled.

But he soon found this to be a state of things that could not possibly continue.

It was no illusion.

It was reality.

His two lost companions, who he had almost despaired of finding, were there within reach of his arm.

And at liberty.

By some means it was clear they had escaped Jonathan Wild.

Little did Jack and Edgworth Bess think while they were talking about their absent comrade that he was so close to them.

The discovery would be a startling one.

Blueskin knew this, and he did not wish to startle them any more than he could help, for fear that in their astonishment they should give vent to an ejaculation which might reach unfriendly ears, and be the means of bringing danger upon them all.

Without moving from the position he occupied, he said, in a low voice, not much above a whisper—

"Jack."

The well-remembered tones struck home to Jack Sheppard's memory the instant he heard them, although spoken so quietly.

He started to his feet, to the consternation of Edgworth Bess, and asked—

"What—who is that?"

"Hush, Jack," continued Blueskin, still immovable, and speaking in the same faint tone of voice. "Hush, Jack, for fear you should give the alarm. I am here. Hush, all is well. We have met, though it is more than I hoped for."

Jack Sheppard clasped his hands over his eyes.

He fancied he must be dreaming.

Blueskin got down off the seat, and came towards him, still crying—

"Hush—hush."

It was Edgworth Bess who first comprehended the affair.

With a faint cry of joy, for she had heard Blueskin's caution to be silent, she sprang forward, and grasped him tightly by the arm.

At the same time she said—

"Oh! joy—joy! Jack, here is Blueskin! He has found us."

And then Jack removed his hands from his face, and, finding the occurrences of the past few moments to be no dream, as he feared they were, he, with the utmost gladness, seized Blueskin's hand, and pressed it warmly between his own.

Over the scene which followed their singular reunion we need not linger. We are already acquainted with all the singular adventures which befel them during their separation, and therefore we have no need, as they have, to relate what happened in the past.

The time was occupied in mutual explanations.

The loss of the treasure very much troubled Blueskin, and he almost felt inclined to encounter the pirates single-handed in their secret haunt, and endeavour to wrest it from them, for, of course, neither he nor Jack knew a word about Wild's attack.

Blueskin had placed great reliance and importance upon the possession of that treasure, and now that it was gone he felt thrown aback, and he knew not what to do.

He knew, too, the risk and danger they had passed through to obtain it, and now it was all swept away from them, and none at all left.

All the money the three possessed if put together made but an insignificant and trifling sum.

With so little as that in their pockets, how were they to do battle with so powerful an adversary as Jonathan Wild, who had unlimited means at his disposal?

They had all along found it a hard struggle, but now the difficulties were much increased.

Friendless, homeless, almost penniless, hunted by the law, with a price set upon their heads, liable to instant apprehension, what were they to do?

The enemies they had were so unscrupulous.

Unquestionably the plan which Blueskin had devised of obtaining a sum of money and then going abroad until Edgworth Bess came of age was a good one, but, alas! the fates willed that it should never be carried out.

But we will not anticipate the progress of events.

That plan must for the present, however, be abandoned, because one of the essential principles of it was now deficient.

What were they to do?

The question was an all-important one, and they found it was no easy task to frame an answer to it.

They must, too, shortly move from their present place of shelter—it was a wonder they were allowed to remain unmolested for so long—for in a little while it would be daylight.

Already the clouds in the eastern quarter of the sky had assumed a dull gray tint, announcing that the morning was now close at hand.

It was Blueskin who called the attention of Jack and Edgworth Bess to this circumstance.

"We must get away from here," he said, "and that as quickly as possible. I am convinced that Jonathan Wild has got a spy in almost every street in London, and that it is impossible for us to move without being seen."

"What do you propose, then?"

"To get out into the country. There, where the dwellings are far apart, and people seldom met with, I should think we should be safest from Jonathan Wild."

"So we shall," replied Jack. "That is a good thought, Blueskin, and we will act upon it at once. In some out-of-the-way country place we shall be as safe from Jonathan Wild as if we went abroad."

"I don't know that exactly. You see, we want the means of living; but I will not put the worst case on things. Come! I should recommend you to start at once."

"We will."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Come on then. No, stay! Hark! What is that?"

The loud trampling of many horses' feet came to the ears of the three fugitives as Blueskin uttered these disjointed ejaculations.

"Back—back," he said. "Who these horsemen can be, I know not. They are coming this way. Let us shrink back into the shadow until they are past, and then we shall be on the safe side."

As he spoke, Blueskin pushed his two companions further back into the embrasure, while the sounds of the horses' feet beating on the hard roadway became more and more audible.

Anxiously and curiously the three fugitives peered forth from their dark hiding-place.

Old London-bridge was lighted with oil lamps, or rather it was supposed to be lighted, for the amount of illumination was so feeble that each lamp looked like a star, and nothing more.

Then the buildings, which at that time covered the bridge, cast a deep black shadow.

They did not anticipate, therefore, having an opportunity of seeing, with any degree of distinctness, what horsemen went by.

Still they looked.

Tramp! tramp! came the hoof-beats, each one seeming to cause the structure to vibrate beneath their feet.

At length the foremost horseman in the throng came in sight.

They were all riding in a dense throng.

The eyes of all three of the fugitives were riveted upon this first horseman in the troop.

Despite the dark shadows of the houses.

Despite the insufficiency of light emitted by the oil lamps.

Despite the speed with which he swept by them, he was immediately recognised by all three, though neither moved nor spoke, nor in any other way betrayed their knowledge.

Too often had they seen that form, and under so many varying circumstances for them to make any mistake.

It was Jonathan Wild.

What a strange chance it was, that at that particular hour of this most eventful night, that the chief actors in this terrible drama should all be within so short a distance of each other—that indeed they should all stand upon London-bridge at the same moment!

And yet such was the case.

Jonathan Wild was returning from the mill.

He was followed by his son, his janizaries, and those pirates he had taken prisoners.

He was in a very gloomy state of mind indeed, and Wild, junior, finding there was no prospect of getting him into conversation, fell back, and let him go on by himself.

Not for one moment did the idea cross the mind of the great thief-taker that those three persons who had given him so much trouble were so near to him. Little did he think that he should pass them on the road.

Little did he think that their position was such that escape would have been an impossibility.

Had he been aware of their hiding-place, his men could have surrounded it, and then those within must either have surrendered or adopted the only other alternative left open to them, that of jumping into the Thames.

But Jonathan remained in ignorance, and rode by unsuspectingly.

Gloomy—reserved—muttering occasional curses—and planning the execution of fresh villainies—the notorious thief-taker took his way in a direct line to his own house in Newgate-street.

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

BLUESKIN DEVISES A PLAN FOR BAFFLING JONATHAN WILD.

ALL three of the fugitives drew a long breath of relief when this imminent peril fairly passed by them.

But they did not venture to emerge from their place of concealment until the sounds of the horses' feet had entirely died away.

Then Jack spoke.

"That was what I call a narrow escape," he said. "If we had left this embrasure he would, in all probability, have seen us."

"He might have done so."

"Let us take encouragement from this occurrence."

"We ought to take advantage of it."

"How so?"

"Why, we happen to know just where our enemy is. He has taken the road just opposite to the one I had fixed upon in my own mind, so there will soon be a considerable distance between us."

"I understand you. It is your wish to start at once."

"This moment."

"And which way shall you go?"

"The nearest to the open country."

"That will be down the Borough."

"Just so. As I said, in exactly the opposite direction to that taken by Jonathan Wild. Come at once."

As Blueskin spoke he stepped out of the recess where he had been concealed on to the pavement of the bridge.

He was quickly and closely followed by Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess.

It took them but a few minutes to cross the bridge, and then, in accordance with Blueskin's intention, they took their way down the Borough, that being the route by which the country could be soonest gained.

Blueskin walked a little in advance, but not so much so as to make conversation inconvenient.

Edgworth Bess and Jack Sheppard walked together.

It was the latter who broke the silence.

"You have made up your mind to get into the country, Blueskin, but have you thought at all about the means by which we are to get there?"

"I was just doing so when you spoke."

"Well?"

"I was considering the difficulties that stood in the way."

"What are they?"

"Very great. In the first place, the move would do no good if we left any trace by which we could be followed."

"I suppose that is the chief difficulty."

"It is, for of course you understand that if Jonathan knows where we are we shall not be any better off than we were before."

"We shall be worse."

Certainly we shall, because in the country we should not have the same facilities of concealing ourselves as we have in London."

"Very well, then. That only serves to show you the absolute and imperative necessity of not leaving the least clue behind us."

"You are right! But what do you propose?"

"I thought at first that we might perhaps take places

in the stage-coach, but a little reflection showed me that such a course would be about the most dangerous we could adopt."

"I should not have thought so."

"I will tell you my reasons. I had the idea that Jonathan Wild had established a very elaborate spy system, and what you told me about the bill with 'Reward!' printed at the top of it convinces me that I am right."

"But what of that?"

"A great number of those bills would, beyond all doubt, be put into circulation, and, in anticipation of our leaving London, Jonathan would be cunning enough to give one to the guard and driver of every coach that leaves London, and so you see we should be almost sure to be detected, for though the guard himself might not interfere with us, yet he would know whereabouts he put us down, and what would be easier than for him to communicate that piece of intelligence to Jonathan Wild?"

"I see now."

"I am of opinion that the risk would be by far too great for us to incur, so that the idea of making our journey by stage-coach must, I think, be abandoned."

"But, if so, what are we to do? As we have told you, the pirates have left us almost penniless, and you say that your pecuniary position is far from good. What then are we to do?"

"I will tell you what I consider the only safe course left open to us."

"What is it?"

"To walk."

"Walk?"

"Yes."

"But we cannot."

"Why not?"

"There is Bess"—

"Do you think I have omitted the fact of her being with us in my calculations?"

"But the poor girl is already worn out with fatigue, and is, I am quite certain, incapable of a long journey on foot."

"How about yourself? Are you capable?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, all is easy."

"Explain."

"Willingly. In the first place I should propose that we all three walk as far as we can without completely exhausting ourselves. In this way I hope to get out of London."

"Yes."

"When we once get amongst the country lanes there are, as you must be well aware, heavy waggons drawn by a team of horses, both going to and from the city."

"But the objections you have made to riding in the stage-coach would apply equally well to them."

"Hear me out, if you please."

"Go on, then."

"We shall be out of London before we attempt to notice one. We should then look out for a waggon returning home empty, in which people often ride."

"I know all about that."

"Well, then, suppose we see one of these waggons coming."

"Yes."

"My advice would be that we give Edgworth Bess money and leave her in the road while we hide behind the hedgerows. Then, when the waggon comes up, Edgworth Bess must stop it and ask for a ride. The waggoner's suspicions, seeing her alone, will not probably be excited. She will be allowed to enter the waggon. Now do you understand?"

"Perfectly. We shall then follow on foot, taking care not to be seen ourselves, and yet not allowing the waggon to be one moment out of our sight."

"That is just it. What do you think of the plan?"

"It is a very good one. A better could not be devised, and, what is more, it can be carried out with the utmost ease."

"Then we are agreed upon that point?"

"Yes, if Edgworth Bess is."

"Oh! I am. In the matter of our mutual safety I shall always fall in with any arrangements you may propose. I have no objection to the plan, if I could only feel sure, as Jack has just said, that the waggon was never a moment out of your sight."

"You may rely upon that."

"Then I consent gladly."

"That's well. You see while we have been talking we have already walked a considerable distance, and almost unconsciously."

"We have."

"Courage, then. We shall very soon be fairly out of London, and when we are you shall enter the first empty waggon going in our direction. We shall easily be able to keep up with it, because its speed is sure not to exceed four miles an hour."

In such like talk as this the tedium of their long walk was chased away.

The new day came.

The sun rose in all his majesty in the eastern sky, and tinted the earth with his glowing beams. He mounted higher and higher in the heavens, and still found our travellers upon the road.

London was fairly left behind, and the beautiful open country gained.

Edgworth Bess bore up bravely.

She was very weak and very much exhausted by the exertions she had already made.

Still she cheerfully kept on.

Whenever they could they rested her, sometimes by sitting upon the trunk of a tree lying by the roadside; at others, by sitting on the banks beneath the hedges, or on stiles leading over into fields.

For the time of year, the day was a very warm one, and one would scarcely have thought the season so far advanced as it was.

The sky was cloudless—of an intense blue colour very rarely seen in England, and the sun shone with great power and brightness.

Autumn had tinted the leaves upon the trees, and gave them a yellow tinge, but on this fine day they looked like grain gradually ripening in the sun, and not as though they were in one of the stages of decay.

All seemed beautiful.

The birds sang, and flew blithely in the air.

Who would have thought there was such a thing as trouble and unhappiness, when all around looked so joyful?

Our friends having been cooped up so long in London, looked upon the beauties of the country with sensations of the keenest delight.

To them the scene had the greatest of all charms—that of novelty.

At the next village they came to Blueskin determined to purchase some provisions, a portion of which Edgworth Bess could take with her in the waggon.

To have all three entered an inn they felt would have been too dangerous. It would have seemed like courting detection.

This resolve Blueskin put into execution, and was fortunate enough to make his purchases without raising the least suspicion.

They went on some distance further, until the village was left behind, and then they sat down by the wayside, for all three acutely felt the pangs of hunger.

The repast was a rude one, but they were satisfied with it.

A large portion of the provisions was made up into a bundle for Edgworth Bess to take with her, for they determined she should not walk further, but wait until the next waggon passed.

All the money they individually possessed was counted up into one total, and then divided into three equal portions.

This done, they sat down and waited.

Behind where they sat was a tall hedgerow, in which was a most convenient gap, through which Jack and Blueskin could make their way at a moment's notice.

They then sat and rested for nearly an hour, all the time listening intently for the approach of a waggon, but none appeared.

Presently, however, the faint tinkling of bells reached Blueskin's attentive ears, and then he knew that the waggon was coming, for in those days a musical, jingling bell formed a part of almost every cart-horse's harness.

"Quick, Jack," he said; "out of sight. We must not be seen, and, least of all, seen hiding ourselves. Come."

Then turning to Edgworth Bess, he said—

"You quite understand what you have to do?"

"Oh! yes."

"When the waggon comes you must call out at the top of your lungs to the driver, and ask him to give you a lift. You must get in in the best manner you can."

"But," asked Edgworth Bess, "suppose he should ask me where I am going?"

"You need not tell him. Say you are going a few miles along the road."

"Very well; and there is another thing."

"Be quick, then, for in another minute or two the waggon will be in sight."

"I wanted to know how I was to find out when you required me to alight and go no further."

"How fortunate that you should think of that. I confess it had escaped me. I will tell you. When you hear three loud whistles close together, coming from somewhere near you, understand by that that there is some reason why you should alight."

"What shall I do then?"

"Walk slowly along the road after the waggon, and continue to do so till we overtake you."

"Very well."

"You quite comprehend all our instructions?"

"Oh! quite, and I will remember them. There is only one thing which gives me uneasiness."

"What is that?"

"I am fearful you should miss the waggon, and that we should be unlucky enough to be separated again, and you must recollect that alone I should be defenceless and incapable of taking my own part."

"Dismiss from your mind all apprehension on that score. Believe me, such fears are utterly groundless, so do not allow them to give you any uneasiness."

"I will rely upon you."

"Do so—do so. We must part now, but only in appearance. You need not fear any danger, because you can depend upon our being close at hand to defend you."

"Thanks—thanks! You are very good to me. Indeed, if I had not two such friends as you are, my lot would be a pitiable one, indeed. There is only one thing that reconciles me. I think a time will come when I shall be able to display my gratitude."

"Farewell—farewell! We must begone, or the waggoner will see us, and then he would be suspicious at once. Rely upon our watching over you."

With these words Blueskin and Jack Sheppard left Edgworth Bess, and crawled through the gap in the hedge into the field.

Here they were able to lie down at full length and be sure that no one could see them from the road, while at the same time they were easily able, by looking between the intricate roots, to see the road and everything upon it.

They could see Edgworth Bess as she sat upon a log of wood. The sun shone brightly upon her, and invested her with a wondrous beauty. It did, indeed, seem a world of pities that one so young and lovely should be the victim of such unrelenting persecution.

CHAPTER CCLXXV.

THE THREE FUGITIVES SEEK SHELTER WITH THE GIPSIES.

THE jingling of the bells upon the horses' heads now sounded very plainly, and mingled with the pleasant sound there came the heavy lumbering of wheels.

The fact is, the waggon would have come in sight much sooner than it did but for the circumstance of there being a bend in the road, which prevented anything from being seen until it was close at hand.

Suddenly, then, the unwieldy vehicle came in sight, and then Edgworth Bess rose to her feet.

There was a feeling of great security about the young girl's heart, produced by the assurances which her two protectors had given her.

Indeed, it might be said that she felt scarcely any fear.

The fresh pure air, too, of the country had revived her to a wonderful degree, and, though she had travelled so many miles, she did not feel so fatigued even as she did when she left London-bridge.

On came the waggon, the horses nodding their heads violently at every step they took, and causing the bells to ring.

Very much to the astonishment of our heroine, she was unable to see any signs of a driver.

The horses appeared to have it all their own way, and to be going along quite independently of anybody.

Edgworth Bess was not aware of the mode in which the drivers of heavily laden waggons looked after their teams.

The driver was quite comfortable—asleep under the canvas covering.

The horses were asleep, too, in all probability.

Edgworth Bess did not know what to do. It seemed ridiculous to shout when there was no one to shout to.

In a whisper, for he saw her hesitation, Blueskin told her to cry "stop!"

It was, perhaps, the first time the young girl had ever cried "stop!" to anything on the king's highway.

However, she now shouted out with right good will, and repeated her cry again and again, until at length the lazy driver made his appearance, and stopped his team.

Edgworth Bess, according to her instructions, proffered her request to be allowed to ride a little way because she was tired and weary.

The man, struck perhaps by her beauty and the gentle, winning manner in which she made her request, at once gave his consent, and actually got down and assisted her into the waggon.

There were two canvas flaps which hung down and covered the ends of the waggon, but the driver drew these aside and fastened them in that position by means of a strap.

The interior of the waggon was littered to a depth of several inches with fresh, clean straw, which was all that it contained.

Edgworth Bess found she had quite a comfortable seat, and by sitting close to the end she was able to see a long way down the road.

The waggoner was one of those rough but kind-hearted men which are so frequently met with employed in such pursuits.

He made himself friendly with the poor heiress at once, and, having set his team in motion, he talked to her upon various subjects, and thus beguiled the tediousness of her journey.

From time to time she looked down the road, and at the hedges on either side, but on no occasion did she catch a glimpse of either of her two protectors.

Indeed, she scarcely expected to do so, although she kept looking with a forlorn sort of hope, for she knew how sedulously they would keep themselves hidden from the driver's view.

Hours passed by.

The sun which the poor girl had seen rise that morning she now saw descending in the western sky.

She had produced her little bundle of provisions, and invited the driver to share them with her.

They passed through many villages, none of which were known to Edgworth Bess.

The signal had not reached her ears, so she came to the conclusion that all was well, and that her two friends were following the waggon, which they would be easily able to do, for it went over the ground at a very lazy rate indeed.

As it grew dusk, the driver, who had never, perhaps, kept awake for such a long time at a stretch as he had done since he picked up Edgworth Bess, now dropped off into a slumber.

A few minutes after Edgworth Bess unconsciously joined him in it.

The poor girl was thoroughly worn out, and sleep was just the thing she required.

To be sure, her repose was none of the soundest or easiest, but still she slept, though the least thing in the world would have roused her.

How long she slept she knew not, but it was for some time.

The sun sunk.

Darkness came over the earth by slow and imperceptible degrees.

Suddenly the waggon stopped.

The cessation of the uneasy motion had the immediate effect of waking Edgworth Bess and the waggoner as well.

"Dang it!" he said, "I s'pose we's reached home, then."

Edgworth Bess was rather confused for a moment, and then she recollected where she was.

"Don't you go any further, then?" she asked.

"No, miss," replied the waggoner, "I am at the end of my journey now. I wish I wasn't if you have any further to go."

"You are very kind," said Edgworth Bess, smiling at the man's rude compliment. "I have not much further to go, however. You have stopped very conveniently for me."

"That's lucky, miss, for I should not like you to go far such a night as this."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you for your kindness," replied Edgworth Bess, who was touched to the heart by the waggoner's behaviour. "I shall not forget you."

"All right, miss," said he, giving his whip a tremendous crack.

Edgworth Bess slipped some money into his hand, and then hastened along the road.

She did not go further, however, than just to get out of sight of the waggon.

According to her arrangement, she sat down there and waited for the coming of Jack and Blueskin.

Despite their assurance that they would not let the waggon be out of their sight for a single moment, she could not help feeling anxious and uneasy.

She started at every slight sound that came to her ears.

It was profoundly dark.

The hour was somewhere about midnight.

Dense lead-coloured clouds covered the heavens, and now and then the squally gusts of winds that blew at short intervals would bring with them a dash of rain drops.

Presently Edgworth Bess heard her name pronounced in a faint tone by a well-remembered voice.

She replied gladly enough.

The next moment there was a crackling sound, and Blueskin and Jack Sheppard broke through the hedgerow on one side of the road.

With one bound they were at her side.

The meeting was as glad a one as though they had been separated for years instead of a few hours.

"The waggon has reached the end of its journey, then, it seems," said Jack Sheppard. "We were at first somewhat in doubt about it, for we could hardly tell whether such was the case, or whether the man had made a call upon the road."

"No," he said that was home."

"So we found, and then we made all speed here. Did you find your ride a comfortable one?"

"Very, and the driver was very kind to me indeed."

"Do you feel rested?"

"Quite. But how are you?"

"Well—rather tired."

"Have you followed the waggon on foot all the time?"

"Yes."

"Since we started?"

"Yes."

"And you have been walking ever since before day-break, surely you must be completely worn down?"

"We are, if we only confessed the truth. At last we had some trouble to keep up with you."

"And I was riding while you were so tired."

"What of that?"

"It does not seem right."

"But it is. We had, however, made up our minds to seek shelter somewhere or other as soon as we see our opportunity."

"Oh! do so—do so."

"Come, then. We will walk a little further along the road. We may, perhaps, come to some place where it would be safe for us to ask for a night's lodging."

"What is that?" asked Jack Sheppard, pointing with his finger as he spoke.

"What?"

"Cannot you see a bright light yonder?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I cannot make out. It is nowhere on the high-road I fancy. It seems to me, to be right away over the fields."

"It does."

"Stop a moment, and I will try to make out what it is."

The three fugitives halted, and Blueskin put his hands up to his eyes in such a manner as to prevent all extraneous rays of light from falling on them, and looked long and earnestly at the light.

"I have it," he said, at length.

"What do you make it out to me?"

"A fire."

"A fire?"

"Yes, I can tell by the tone in which you ask that question that you do not understand me. It is the fire belonging to a gipsy encampment."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh! yes, I caught sight of the canvas tents."

"Then, Blueskin, my friend," said Jack Sheppard, "that is the thing for us."

"You would seek shelter there?"

"Yes."

"I should think it would be safe?"

"I should think so. At any rate, it is worth our while to try. If they will only consent to allow us to sleep along with them in their tents we shall be all right. There will be no fear of their betraying us."

"Let us try the experiment, then, for, if you will believe me, I am so weary that I can scarcely bear to put my foot on the ground."

"I too am weary," said Blueskin; "for I have gone through a great deal of fatigue since I slept last."

"You have, indeed."

While speaking, the three worn out fugitives took their way in as direct a line as possible to the light which indicated the presence of the gipsy encampment.

The high-road they found intersected a common, of the size of which they could form no definite idea.

It was somewhere on this piece of waste land doubtless that the gipsies had pitched their tents.

As they went nearer the fire appeared to increase in brightness, and our three friends could see, not only the tents of which Blueskin had spoken, but also several dusky-looking figures.

When within about a hundred yards of the fire, a man suddenly sprang up from the ground, and planted himself directly in their path.

In a gruff voice he desired to know where they were going, and what they wanted.

Blueskin replied—

"We are three poor fugitives, wearied unto death, and outcasts from the house-dwellers. We want to know whether the Zingari will give us shelter for one night beneath their tents?"

"You are spies," said the man with the gruff voice.

"Begone!"

"No, we are not spies. We are what we tell you—friendless, wandering outcasts. We are not penniless, however, though we are poor; and if you will grant us the accommodation we really very much require, you shall have all we can afford to spare to repay you for your trouble."

"You speak fair," said the man. "The Zingari is not one to turn his back upon others. He knows what it is to be friendless and alone. Come with me. I will take you to the tents, and present you to our queen. Whether she will allow you to stay, I know not."

As he spoke, the gipsy turned abruptly on his heel, and led the way to the encampment.

Our friends followed him.

The common was very rough and full of treacherous holes, while here and there stunted gorse-bushes stuck up, to the imminent danger of the pedestrian who came upon them unseen.

Edgworth Bess stumbled several times, and narrowly escaped a heavy fall, so Jack made her take hold of his arm.

After a few minutes the encampment was reached. Somehow or other, the scene which presented itself appeared a very comfortable one.

The bright fire looked doubly cheerful when contrasted with the large expanse of common which surrounded it, and its light fell with a pretty and picturesque effect upon the tents and upon the clump of elm trees, beneath whose shadow they were pitched.

The fire-light fell with a Rembrandt-like effect upon the swarthy forms and countenances of the gipsies who were seated around it.

To our three tired fugitives the scene before them was

one of rest and comfort, and they were pleased with it accordingly.

The man who had acted in the capacity of guide now addressed some words to his companions in a language quite incomprehensible to the fugitives.

With some anxiety they waited for the reply.

At length it came.

They would be allowed to stay there that night upon their taking an oath not to betray them.

This the fugitives readily enough did, for they had no intention of doing such a thing.

After this, bread was broken between them, after which they were safe.

They were invited to sit down.

Gladly enough did they do so.

The warmth of the fire was very acceptable, for the night was chilly.

Three wooden sticks, secured at the top, and placed in the primitive triangular position, suspended a large three-legged pot, from which savoury steams arose.

The three friends were happier that night than they had been for a long time.

They felt a sense of great security.

They partook heartily of the supper along with the gipsies as soon as it was ready, and then all retired to rest in the various tents, with the exception of those whose duty it was to perform the part of scouts, and apprise the main body of the approach of any foes.

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, AND EDGWORTH BESS ARRIVE AT THE SUICIDE'S GRAVE AT THE FOUR CROSS-ROADS.

The night passed away calmly and quietly, and without the occurrence of any incident whatever.

In the morning the three fugitives were aroused by the gipsies, but their fatigue was so great that they entreated them to allow them to rest a little longer.

Their request was granted, but the piece of information was added that they were about to strike their tents at sunset, and proceed in the direction of London.

All three of the fugitives were very sorry to hear this. They were in hopes they should have been able to protract their stay, but this townwards movement put an end to all such ideas at once.

There is very little question that, if they could have joined a band of gipsies who intended to make an excursion into the interior they would have been tolerable safe, for the trace they left behind them would be one which even Jonathan Wild himself would have some trouble in following.

But they were doomed to be thrown altogether upon their own resources, and denied even this amount of safety.

Towards sunset they were again aroused, and this time they had no choice but to rise.

They were, however, wonderfully rested.

Indeed, they felt themselves endowed with unusual strength and spirits.

"It is, perhaps, all for the best, Jack," said Blueskin, alluding to their departure from the gipsies' tents. "We are a great deal too near London to be safe. Jonathan might track us thus far with ease, and he would not be likely to pass by a gipsies' encampment without thoroughly searching it."

"Perhaps it is for the best."

"The advantages of a stay here would be many and great, but we must get further away from London. We are now rested and refreshed, and I advise that we should pass the night in walking. We must trust to providence to find us another shelter."

"I leave you captain of this campaign, Blueskin. I am sure you will do all for the best."

"Let us prepare to start, then. You see the gipsies are already beginning to move their things, and I should not like to trespass upon their kindness."

"Certainly not; they have behaved very well to us."

"They have. Now go and call Edgworth Bess."

The poor girl was in company with the female gipsies belonging to the tribe, and Jack hastened off to fetch her.

He soon returned, and then, having bid adieu to the friendly gipsies, they resumed their toilsome journey.

By the time the sun started the sun had set, and darkness had begun to cover the earth.

There were indications, too, by the look of the clouds on the horizon, that the night would be a stormy one.

A moaning wind came rushing by, and the tree-tops dashed together and rustled with a melancholy sound.

Every now and then, too, there would come a threatening splash of rain.

Blueskin observed these indications of elemental strife with an uneasy mind.

He knew what they foreboded.

It was not for himself that he cared, but Edgworth Bess.

He knew her constitution was not one that would bear with impunity the inclemency of the weather.

Still he resolved to push on.

There was no place close at hand where they could have stayed, and the threatened storm might perhaps hold over until the morning.

Edgworth Bess uttered no word of complaint.

She took hold of Jack Sheppard's arm to assist herself.

In this way they walked on for some time, until, indeed, the middle of the night was reached.

By that time the sky had assumed an appearance angry in the extreme.

Threatening black clouds had piled themselves up, and made the darkness doubly deep.

The moaning of the wind, too, increased in loudness, and the splashes of rain came with greater force and frequency.

Nowhere could the fugitives see a dwelling-house of any kind. All around them was dark, drear, and desolate.

They were, in fact, pursuing a cross-country road that was but little frequented.

Suddenly the rain broke forth with all its fury.

There were a few premonitory heavy drops, which fell with a sudden clash upon the earth, and then the rain came down in torrents.

Our three friends were wet through to the skin instantly.

Fain would they have withdrawn into some place where they could have at least obtained something like shelter from the rain.

But no such place presented itself to their view.

There were hedgerows on either side of the road, but they were so low and thin that they would not have afforded the least protection.

The rain did not seem to come down in drops, but in one huge sheet, as though a cloud had suddenly dissolved into moisture and precipitated its contents bodily upon the earth.

Then came the thunder.

Faint muttering and far off at first, but gradually increasing until it seemed to shake the very ground beneath their feet.

And the lightning was both vivid and incessant.

The three friends cowered down before it.

But Blueskin and Jack Sheppard both directed the chief part of their attention to their fair companion, and strove to make her position as little miserable as possible.

How grateful she felt for all their kindness!

Suddenly, in the deep obscurity, Blueskin perceived some shadowy-looking object.

What it was, Blueskin could not take upon himself to say.

It seemed to occupy the centre of the roadway.

Its outlines were dim and indistinct.

It looked like a huge mass of black cloud.

At the next flash of lightning Blueskin hoped to be able to make out what it was.

He pointed it out to his two companions, and bade them fix their eyes upon it also, and to take all the advantage they could of the transient flash of light.

They did so.

They did not have long to wait for the coming of the next flash.

They succeeded each other at very brief intervals.

Flash!

The intensely brilliant blue light shot across the sky, and momentarily illuminated all things.

Then there was darkness.

The three fugitives had not been able to glean much

knowledge respecting the strange object in the road before them.

It looked huge and black.

What could it be?

They crept forward to ascertain, for although the rain poured down in such heavy torrents their curiosity was much excited.

They were not without the hope, too, that it might prove a shelter of some kind.

Hastening forward in a crouched-up attitude—for the violence of the storm made them cower down before it—they directed their steps to the mysterious object.

It was not far in advance, so they soon reached it.

Just as they arrived there came another flash of lightning more vivid and enduring than any they had yet noticed.

The object before them was then fully revealed.

They saw it with distinctness for the first time only.

In the very centre of the road was piled up a huge mound of stones.

What the motive could be, our friends were at a loss to imagine.

There was no regularity in the manner in which the stones were heaped, nor in the size of the materials which were used.

Some were small pebbles and others huge fragments of rock which would have taken three men to lift.

The only thing seemed to be that, whoever had done this, had desired to raise a mound of stones in the road, and was by no means careful how he did it, and cared little about the shape which the whole mass might assume.

Standing close to it as they did, our friends were able to see it with tolerable ease and distinctness without the aid of the lightning, for the rain had fallen upon the stones and given them a shining, phosphorescent appearance.

Looking up to the top of this mound of stones Blueskin saw something projecting from it, and then, for the first time, he had an idea of what the strange spectacle before him signified.

Sticking up from the centre of the mound was something which looked like a piece of wood.

As soon as he noticed this, Blueskin turned his attention from the mound to a contemplation of the spot upon which he stood.

He looked around him closely, and then the suspicion which had entered his mind was confirmed.

Jack had noticed his motions and so had Edgworth Bess, and both in one voice asked him the meaning of what they saw.

"I will tell you," he said. "You may neither of you have seen such a thing before, but I can assure you they are very common. We are now standing where two roads cross each other at right angles."

"You mean four cross-roads?"

"Yes. Four cross-roads. Now, perhaps, you understand?"

"No, I do not."

"Then, by the law of the land, those who put an end to their own lives are buried in the centre of four cross-roads without any burial service read over them. A long hedge-stake, sharpened at one end to a point, is driven through their breasts into the ground; thus, in a manner of speaking, pinning them to the ground. Then the earth is shovelled into the hole, and a lot of stones piled round the stake just in the manner you now see before you."

These terrible words which Blueskin just uttered with respect to a disgusting custom, brought back to the minds of both his hearers the fact that they had, in times long back heard of such things but they had not known whether to believe them or treat them as fables.

Now, however, there was no room for scepticism.

The dread, stern, horrible reality was before them.

It was an odious and abhorrent ceremony.

It is wonderful however it could have been otherwise to civilized organizations.

Even the most brutal and ferocious savages forbear from desecrating the body of the dead.

What good could it do to wreak such a vengeance upon a senseless corpse?

What knowledge had it of the indignities inflicted upon it after death?

The sensitive mind of Edgworth Bess shrank back in horror from such a close contemplation of so dreadful a thing.

Yet there it was palpable before them.

It is not too much to say that the interest and attention of the three fugitives was so absorbed by the contemplation of this strange spectacle, that they were for a time oblivious of the fact that the storm raged with undiminished fury.

To them the unhallowed grave of the suicide possessed a fascination which they could not shake off.

A thousand thoughts and questions rushed into their minds to which they were totally unable to frame any reply.

Who could have been the unhappy individual who had come to sad an end?

That probably was more than they would ever know.

"This is horrible," said Edgworth Bess; "most horrible. Until this moment I had no idea that such atrocities could be sanctioned by the law."

"It is so," said Blueskin; and I am not afraid to say that the civilized inhabitants would rise up to a man were any alteration proposed in the existing law!"

"No—no. I will not believe that."

"It is true."

"Where are their hearts?"

"If you mean where are their pity and their feelings, I should say they were just about as deficient of both as these rough stones which are heaped up over the suicide's grave."

"Good heavens! can it be possible?"

"It is true. But come, this is not exactly the time to stand talking upon such a subject, no matter how deep an interest we might feel in it. It is quite time we looked for and found some shelter."

"It is indeed. I am soaked through to the skin."

"But," said Jack Sheppard, "I can see no signs of any place which will afford us shelter. We seem to be in an uninhabited region."

"So we do. But there are four roads, and surely one of them must lead to a dwelling."

"Which one shall we take?"

"We must look and see which one appears to be most frequented, and take that."

"Good."

"Go on, then."

At this moment there came a flash of lightning of such extraordinary vividity, that it seemed to scorch the very eyeballs of the three fugitives.

Instinctively they clasped their hands over their faces to shut out the fearful brilliancy.

No sooner, however, had they done so than the thunder pealed forth with ear-splitting loudness.

It seemed as though the hollow reverberations would never cease.

At last, however, they died away.

Then there came a gush of wind, bearing upon its wings certain sounds, which, however, reached the ears of Jack alone.

"Hark!" he cried to his his companions; "hark! hark!"

They listened eagerly, for they knew not what it was to which Jack wished them to hearken.

All was still.

"What is it?" they asked.

"I heard the tramp of many horses' feet."

"No—no! Impossible!"

"I did. The sound came to my ears quite distinctly. The wind seemed to blow it in. But I can hear the sounds no longer."

"It must have been fancy."

"No—no, I am sure it was not. Stay a moment. I will lie down and place my ear upon the ground, and listen if I can hear anything."

As he spoke, Jack Sheppard sank down, and placed his ear upon the ground.

His two companions remained profoundly still.

Oh! how anxious they felt to know the result, for the dread was upon them that Jack was right, and that Jonathan Wild was hard upon their track.



[JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS SEE AN APPARITION IN THE RUINED FARM-HOUSE.]

CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

BLUESKIN, JACK SHEPPARD, AND EDGWORTH BESS SEEK A TEMPORARY REFUGE IN THE RUINED FARM-HOUSE.

JACK SHEPPARD was well aware, from previous experience, that the expedient he had adopted, of lying down and placing his ear close to the ground, would enable him to say with tolerable certainty whether any horsemen were upon the road, or whether his sense of hearing had played him a trick.

Very distant and faint sounds are by this means made quite audible.

Anxiously, then, Jack listened.

He rose up on his feet, however, almost immediately.

"I was right," he said. "I thought I had made no mistake. There are horsemen on the road."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Listen for yourself."

Blueskin placed his ear upon the earth and listened.

The intelligence Jack had given him was indeed too true.

Horsemen were on the road, and in rather large numbers, too.

That it must be Jonathan Wild they felt certain, though they had no very clear grounds for such an assumption.

Still it was a likely one, for Blueskin and Jack both well knew that Jonathan would not relax his efforts to capture them.

That the horsemen were approaching the spot upon which they stood soon ceased to be a matter of doubt.

It was no longer necessary to lie down on the ground to listen. The sounds came quite plainly to their ears, and each moment grew louder.

"We must begone," said Blueskin, "and at once."

"But which way shall we take?"

"That I know not, but I would fain seek the shelter of some dwelling-house, if only for the sake of Bess."

"And I, too."

"It will not be safe for us to take any of these roads, I am afraid, because it is a matter of impossibility for us to say which road Jonathan may take."

"Just so."

"Ere long we shall come to a stile or a gate, or a gap in the hedge, even; and I should advise that we adopt either of these means to gain the meadows."

"What then?"

"We will strike across them, and endeavour to find some habitation."

"Agreed."

"We will shelter there as long as we can, and trust to Jonathan not discovering us."

"We can do nothing else."

"Come on, then, for, if we stay here undecided much longer, we shall have them upon us."

"We shall, indeed."

The violence of the storm had now in some degree abated.

The rain no longer fell as it had done, and the thunder only muttered at distant intervals.

The three fugitives were therefore able to proceed with much more comfort than before.

Blueskin did not hesitate about the choice of which of the four roads he should take. He was content so long as it led away from Jonathan Wild.

They ran down one of the roads, then, and ere they had gone a dozen yards, they saw on the right hand a five-barred gate.

They stopped at once, for it was just the sort of thing they wanted.

Through the bars of the gate they could see the grass in a meadow beyond.

When he got close to the gate, Blueskin was astonished to find what a neglected appearance it presented.

Its ruinous condition was even perceptible in the darkness of the night.

The upright posts or supports on either side of it were both far out of the perpendicular.

The gate hung by one hinge merely, and where it ought to have been shut close and fastened, there was a large crevice.

Then the bars of the gate were broken and decayed, while over the whole there grew some vegetable excrescence of a moss-like character, and which felt soft and clammy when touched.

Blueskin noticed these things in a moment—while he was pushing the dilapidated gate open, in fact.

There was something very extraordinary in a gate being left in such a condition as this, opening as it did from the road, and Blueskin felt convinced that there must be some mystery in connexion with it.

From the difficulty he had in pushing the gate open far enough to allow them to pass through, he came to the conclusion that a long time must have elapsed since it was touched.

He could not understand it.

There was not just then any time for surmises, though, of course, he could not shut his eyes to the obvious peculiarities of the place.

However, he got his companions through as quickly as possible, and then, with some little trouble, he restored the gate to as near the same condition as possible as he found it.

This done, they struck across the meadow in a direction at right angles to the road, and keeping all the time in the shadow of a tall hedge.

As he proceeded, the neglected appearance which he had noticed became more and more apparent.

The grass in the meadow was an enormous height, and very rank in quality.

It was quite certain it had not been mowed that summer at any rate.

The hedge, instead of being trimmed, and presenting the neat appearance which hedges always do present, had shot out straggling branches in all directions, while long trailing shoots extended themselves upon the ground.

These last were perplexing, and made their onward course very difficult, for each moment their feet were catching in them.

At a tolerably rapid rate, however, they left the road behind them, and soon the trampling of horses' hoofs, which had so alarmed them, subsided into silence.

Still they kept on with unabated speed.

Two large meadows were passed through, the condition of both of which was precisely similar.

Entering the third field, the fugitives saw before them

in the distance the dark and shadowy outline of something which looked like a human habitation.

In the hope that this surmise would prove a correct one, they hastened their steps.

As they approached more closely, they saw, to their infinite delight and satisfaction, that it was indeed a dwelling-house.

No light, however, appeared in any part of it, but they were not surprised at that, because they knew it was the custom of country people to retire early.

The outbuildings were first reached, and, from the appearance of these, it became tolerably evident that it was a farm-house they were approaching.

As they came close to them, however, they found they had just the same ruinous appearance as the other objects they had passed.

Blueskin, however, alone appeared to notice it, and, finding this to be the case, he attracted Jack's attention by saying—

"Look at these buildings, Jack. Do you see what a ruinous condition they are in? They do just stand, and that is all."

"I see it now; but, until you pointed it out, I had not noticed it."

"I thought you had not. It strikes me that the house we see yonder is uninhabited."

"I hope not."

"It does not matter. We shall, ten to one, be safer if such proves to be the case."

"We shall have to trust no one."

"Very true; and, consequently, we do not run the risk of being betrayed. But come, quicken your steps, and let us put an end to all doubts upon the subject."

At an accelerated speed, the three fugitives now made their way through what was doubtless originally the fold-yard.

Then a few more steps brought them close to the house.

They found Blueskin's suppositions completely verified. The house was uninhabited and in ruins.

A glance at the half-open door would have proved that instantly.

The walls, too, were crumbling away, and they had collapsed in many places.

There was something repugnant about the place, and all three halted on the threshold.

All around was as silent as the grave.

The rain still fell heavily, and with a steadiness which did not promise it to be of short duration.

Shelter was therefore very desirable.

Still all shrank from crossing the threshold, though why, not one of them could have precisely told.

A vague kind of feeling came over them that all was not well.

It was Blueskin who first recovered from this feeling, and starting forward, he pushed the door open.

It creaked dismally upon its hinges as it swung back for a short distance, and then stopped.

The interior of the farm-house, for such it was, was in absolute darkness.

Not a single thing was distinguishable.

Blueskin nevertheless crossed the threshold, and as he did so, he said—

"Come in out of the rain. I won't keep you in the dark a moment; I will light my lantern."

Blueskin produced a bottle of phosphorus while he uttered these words, and soon had a match alight.

The tiny flame of this he communicated to the wick in his lantern, and there was soon quite enough light to enable them to see about them, and ascertain what kind of place they were in, while, at the same time, owing to its passing through a lens, there was not much danger of its being seen by any one at a distance.

The scene which the lantern revealed, as Blueskin flashed it round him, was indeed a dismal one.

It was the wreck of what had once been a comfortable apartment.

But now one universal aspect of desolation pervaded the whole.

The plaster had fallen in huge flakes from the walls, and on the floor the moisture had collected into sickly-looking pools.

The fire-place was one of an old-fashioned make, consisting of a hearth-stone, upon which the fuel to be

burned was heaped, and over which was the large mouth of a chimney.

But even this was in ruins.

There were a few articles of furniture in the place, and among them a rickety table.

On the side facing the door was a wide staircase with massive balustrades, which the action of time had turned completely black.

The look of this deserted and dilapidated apartment struck a chill to the hearts of the three fugitives as soon as their eyes had embraced its details.

Still it seemed to offer them a shelter from the storm, and perhaps even from their enemies.

Blueskin turned round and shut the door close, though he had to exert himself to press it into its frame.

Then, turning round, he strove to speak such cheering words to his companions in misfortune as he was able to utter.

"Come," he said, "do not look so down-hearted; this is not the most comfortable place in the world, but there are many worse."

"I am very wet and cold," said Edgworth Bess, with a shiver.

"I do not doubt that; we are in the same condition. It is very hard that you, above all others, should be exposed to the inclemency of the weather."

"Do you think there would be much risk in lighting a fire?" asked Jack. "I am perished with cold, and, besides, we should be able to dry our clothes a little."

"I don't see where the risk is at all," replied Blueskin.

"The only question is, where are we to find fuel?"

"There is Jonathan Wild."

"I know there is, but I think we have given him the slip completely. But, if he is hovering about, I don't see that a fire would direct him here."

"Not without he knew this place was uninhabited."

"I don't think it at all likely that he possesses that piece of knowledge."

"He cannot know everything."

"Certainly not."

"Then look about, and, if we can find some dry wood, we will soon have a fire."

Blueskin gave the lantern to Edgworth Bess, and began looking round the apartment for fuel.

To seek it on the outside of the building would be foolish, for all that he found would be sure to be soddened with the rain.

They had not to seek long.

The farm-house had been built in a great measure with wood, and Jack and Blueskin in a few minutes collected quite a heap, which they piled up on the hearth.

It was then set fire to.

The wood was very dry, and consequently burnt into a bright blaze.

The warmth diffused was very agreeable.

Blueskin searched for more wood, and this time selected larger pieces than he had before.

These were placed upon the others, and then they had a fire which would burn for a long time without replenishment.

The three fugitives dried their soaked clothing before it, and warmed themselves thoroughly.

Their blood even had become cold.

At intervals Blueskin and Jack repaired to the door and listened.

Upon no occasion did they hear any sound which indicated the proximity of their foe.

The rain, however, still continued to fall at a steady rate, and the heavens were everywhere covered with a huge black cloud, in which not a single break or rift could be seen.

It was strange to see what an alteration the presence of the fire and of our friends made to the deserted kitchen of the ruined farm-house.

It began to assume quite a cheerful look.

Edgworth Bess was very weary, and as soon as her apparel was dried somewhat, she sat down close to the fire.

Her two protectors persuaded her to sleep if she could, but this she found to be impossible.

The fire crackled and splattered as the rain-drops came down the chimney.

CHAPTER CCLXXXVIII.

BLUESKIN SETS OUT ON HIS RECONNOITERING EXPEDITION, AND MEETS WITH A MISHAP.

COULD Jonathan Wild but have had a peep at the interior of the ruined farm-house, how his heart would have throbbed with glee.

At the head of his band of janizaries he would have rushed into the place and taken them prisoners.

But he had no idea they were located there.

There was a faint prospect that the three fugitives would be allowed a few minutes' rest and peace.

Ere long they overcame the inconvenience which the wet state of their clothing occasioned them, and then they looked more cheerfully around them.

The ruinous and neglected state of the farm-house and the grounds surrounding it, filled them with surprise and conjecture.

It was in vain they tried in various ways to account for what they saw.

They were unable to frame any tangible hypothesis.

The huge kitchen in which they were appeared to form the whole ground-floor of the dwelling.

It was not an uncommon thing for houses to be built in such a manner.

What was overhead they knew not, and as for the stairs, they looked too crazy and rickety for anyone to feel the least inclination to ascend them.

Some more powerful impulse than mere curiosity would be required for the purpose.

At length, after a rather long pause, during which each of the three was busily occupied in thinking over the prospect which the future presented, Blueskin broke the silence.

"We seem to be quite safe here, and free from interruption. I am weary, and so are both of you. What do you say to our passing the night here? In all probability we shall be more safe than elsewhere."

"I was thinking of the very same thing at the moment you spoke," replied Jack. "As you say, I am weary, and a night's rest would be everything to me."

"Oh! stay—stay," cried Edgworth Bess. "We shall be as safe from our persecutors if we remain here than if we go away; perhaps more so, and you and Jack must not forget how necessary it is for you to have rest."

"I am inclined to think it will be best," said Jack. "At any rate, Blueskin, let us stay. It may be a long time before we get into such comfortable quarters again."

"Comfortable quarters? Not very, I should think."

"The place has greatly changed in its appearance during the short time we have occupied it."

"True, so it has. But Jack."

"What, Blue?"

"If we decide to stay, there will be two necessary things to be done."

"What are they?"

"One is, to obtain provisions. If the truth was told, we are all three more in want of food than we are of repose, even though, goodness knows, we want that bad enough."

"We do, indeed, Blue. But what is the next thing necessary to be done?"

"Its importance is second only to the first."

"I am impatient to hear it."

"It is to reconnoitre the premises, and be sure that none of Jonathan Wild's men are about."

"I understand you, but I am afraid the task will be difficult."

"I am ready to undertake it."

"I do not doubt that, but you must permit me to carry it out."

"No—no."

"But I say yes—yes."

"And I say no again. Jack, you must give way to me in this. Without self-flattery, I may say that I am more fitting to perform this task than you are."

"Perhaps so; but"—

"I can listen to no reasons of yours, Jack. I will tell you what I have determined upon doing. You will please to recollect that you have yourself constituted me captain of the campaign."

"If you will not listen, of course it is no good for me to speak. In my opinion it will be much better for me to go."

"I daresay such is my opinion. But listen. I will tell

you what I intend to do. I shall accomplish both my errands at the same time. That is to say, I shall purchase some provisions and ascertain whether Jonathan Wild is in the neighbourhood."

"You will find it a difficult matter to perform your task without exciting suspicion."

"I know that, but you leave it all to me. You may do so with all confidence. I have had experience in matters of this sort, and I know how to set about them. I cannot rest until I have satisfied myself that all is secure, and therefore I go at once."

"But when will you return?"

"That is rather uncertain. I may be back directly—I may be absent for several hours. It is impossible to say what may occur. Do not feel alarmed if I do not return, but wait till daylight."

"And then?"

"Why, then, you may conclude I have got into trouble. But don't trouble your head about that. It is not worth your while. I mention it merely because it is within the bounds of possibility that such a thing may happen."

"I dread to separate from you," said Jack.

"Very likely. I have a similar feeling in my own breast. It is, however, quite certain that we cannot all three go upon this errand, and equally certain that we cannot all three remain here without obtaining some further information respecting the movements of our enemies than we now possess."

"I understand fully the force of all your arguments, and yet——"

"You have a feeling of dread. It is a natural one. Believe me, I have felt the same sensation steal over myself. Now, Jack, I am going. I must—I shall be back soon."

"And I too."

Blueskin looked to his weapons, and having placed them in such a condition as to be ready for immediate use if required, he went to the door, and, opening it, looked out.

He was by no means sorry to see that the rain had almost ceased, and that there were indications in the sky of fair weather.

He lingered a moment at the door of the ruined farmhouse, and then, after repeating his injunctions to his companions, he crossed the threshold, and passed out into the night air.

Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess stood at the open door watching his departure, but as soon as he observed this, Blueskin made them an hasty and imperative sign to close it and retire.

He was fearful that the bright light of the fire within should attract attention.

It was solely against their inclinations, but Jack and Edgworth Bess obeyed the instructions of their companion.

Blueskin looked back, and waited until he saw the door shut.

Then he began to look about him.

The enterprise which he had taken upon himself was one which was by no means easy to execute.

It was to find out whether Jonathan Wild was really lurking in the vicinity.

It will be remembered by the reader that our friends entirely took the alarm from hearing the sounds of horses' hoofs upon the roadway.

This was very far indeed from being an uncommon event, and yet, as we have seen, they jumped to the conclusion that it was Jonathan Wild's approach which was thus heralded.

Whether they were correct in this conclusion they knew not. They had beat a precipitate retreat, and obtained no further information.

It might be that their alarm was altogether groundless.

But, on the other hand, it might have been Jonathan they heard, and, if so, the necessity was very great to know where he was, and how he was employed.

Blueskin kept close under the shelter of the hedges, and crept forward stealthily.

It was much lighter than it had been, though it was still night, and he could see with tolerable ease and comfort about him.

The neglected state of the grounds surrounding the farm-house was, therefore, more perceptible than ever.

The farm seemed one of large extent, but, as far as he

could see, one universal aspect of desolation pervaded the whole.

What could be the cause of such a state of things was hard to say.

Blueskin felt that he should receive no small satisfaction if the mystery was cleared up.

Occupied with these thoughts, he made a complete circuit of the house, but nowhere could he see the least signs of Jonathan Wild.

He began to indulge in the hope that they had needlessly alarmed themselves, and that he was nowhere near.

Besides, Blueskin asked himself, how could he have obtained a clue to their present whereabouts?

He thought he had really left no trace, but then his old foe had come upon him with even more unexpectedness.

Blueskin made two circuits of the house—one rather close to it, and the other at a greater distance.

Then he emerged into the road, where they had entered such a short time before.

He looked up and down, but all was still.

Finding this to be the case, he turned to the right down the road.

If he had turned to the left it would have taken him to the suicide's grave.

As it was, he fancied before he got far he must arrive at a village of some sort.

In this supposition he was quite correct.

Very soon he saw before him a mass of buildings.

He approached these cautiously.

The houses he found were small, and all shut up.

For the first time now the thought struck him that at so late an hour he should have the greatest difficulty perhaps in making any purchases.

It is easy to conceive Blueskin not thinking of this before. He had lived nearly all his life in London, where things are procurable at all hours.

Not a soul was anywhere about, nor was there at any of the windows the faintest glimmer.

His only hope now was to find some inn open.

But after walking quite through the village, that hope was frustrated.

He passed two public-houses, but they were closed, and the inhabitants evidently all in bed.

What to do now he knew not.

He was tired, and almost ready to sink to the ground with hunger.

In the vague hope of finding something, he still wandered on along the road, until the village was left behind.

Finding himself once more in the open country, he turned back.

It was the only thing he could do.

One part of his enterprise had been unsuccessful.

As for the other, he had not seen anything of his enemies.

Suddenly, however, as he was taking his way wearily towards the village, he was startled by a loud cry.

Then there was the hasty trampling of horses' feet.

At the time this happened he was just passing the end of a narrow shady lane, which branched off from the main road upon which he was travelling.

The shout and the trampling of feet came from this lane.

Blueskin turned round with great quickness.

Danger was at hand.

But ere he could do more than become conscious of this, he felt himself struck down as if by lightning.

He fell in the roadway upon his back.

He had a dim consciousness of a loud report like that of a pistol ringing in his ears, but that was all.

He lay on the road at full length, bereft of sense and motion.

It was a pistol shot which had laid him low.

The report was succeeded by a voice, which the reader will recognise instantly.

"D—n me, gu'nner! It's done this time, and no mistake. Pop down he goes. Easy does it."

As he spoke, Wild, junior, for it was no other than that worthy, descended from his steed.

His words were succeeded by a volley of the most horrible imprecations which could come from human lips.

One person only possessed the ability to utter such a speech, and that person was the celebrated thief-taker, Jonathan Wild.

"Easy does it, guv'ner," said his son again, in his usual impassible manner. "Easy does it, guv'ner. Your schemes are all d—d fine, but I thought I would just show you how to do business."

"Ten thousand curses!" yelled Jonathan Wild. "Is he dead?"

"I daresay he is, guv'ner."

"No—no. Tell me anything rather than tell me he is dead. He must live. I must not be cheated thus. I will have my revenge—my revenge! Watson, look at him, and tell me whether he is alive."

Jonathan Wild was accompanied by his janizaries, and the one he had named now hastily dismounted from his steed and proceeded to the spot where Blueskin lay prostrate on the ground.

"Now, guv'ner," said Wild, junior, "how can you be so unreasonable? Take it easy. If he is dead he is out of your road, and let that content you."

"But it will not content me. I will not be balked of my revenge in such a manner. Curses on your officiousness; why did you not leave him to me? I would have captured him alive."

"Don't be a d—d fool."

"Take care, George," said Wild, balefully.

"I say, don't be a d—d fool," repeated his son, undauntedly. "Captured him alive! Stuff and rubbish! You mean you would have let him go like you have done many a time before! You are a regular idiot, guv'ner; you are indeed. Here's your man! I see him! Pop! and down he goes! What more do you want?"

"He is alive, Mr. Wild, I think," said Watson, who, assisted by his comrades, had made an examination of Blueskin's body, and ascertained the extent of his injuries. "He is alive, sir, I think."

"Pour some brandy down his throat," cried Jonathan; "and see if that will have any effect."

"Where is there any brandy, sir?"

"Here," said Wild, and, as he spoke, he pulled a flask out of his own pocket and threw it to the men.

George Wild caught it, and, taking out the cork, he placed the flask to Blueskin's lips, and poured as much as he could down his throat.

Blueskin was on his back, so this was made much easier than it would have been.

The effects of the brandy were rather extraordinary.

Blueskin turned almost black in the face, and gasped once or twice.

Another moment and he would have been suffocated, but Wild, junior, rather roughly turned him over on to his face.

The brandy gurgled from his mouth, but otherwise Blueskin exhibited no signs of life.

CHAPTER CCLXXIX.

JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGORTH BESS SEE AN APPARITION IN THE RUINED FARM-HOUSE.

"JACK, I feel so strangely—there comes such a strange sensation over my heart! What can it mean? It seems like a presentiment of coming danger. Ever since I have been here—ever since I crossed the threshold of this gloomy and deserted habitation—there has been an oppression at my heart which I have tried in vain to shake off, and, now that Blueskin has gone, it has increased tenfold in intensity."

It was Edgorth Bess who spoke these words, as, holding Jack by the hand, she turned away from the door after Blueskin made a sign to them to close it.

Jack Sheppard did not make any immediate reply to her speech, but led her back to the seat she had occupied by the side of the blazing fire.

The words she had just uttered fully expressed the state of his own mind.

Ever since he had entered the farm-house, a dread of impending evil had crept over him, and he had never been more sensible of it than he was at that moment.

It was not his intention, however, to cast a further gloom over the mind of his companion by telling her this. She was sufficiently depressed already, and any increase might be attended with the worst circumstances.

Assuming, then, a tone of voice which he fully intended should be a light-hearted one, but which really was not, he said—

"You must dispel these gloomy thoughts. They will

else only have the effect of unnerving you, and making you unfit for whatever is in store for us."

"I cannot help it, Jack. If you will believe me, I have tried my best to shake it off, but the effort is altogether a vain one."

"You speak in a very desponding tone of voice. You must rouse up and be more cheerful, indeed you must. It is wrong of you to allow yourself to be so influenced by circumstances."

"I cannot help it, Jack."

"I fancy it is the absence of Blueskin which has had the most to do with it."

"Perhaps so. You see he has rejoined us such a little while, and now he seems to be gone again."

"He will soon return."

"I wish I could be sure of that."

"You ought to feel sure. You must know enough of Blueskin by this time—you must have seen enough of him to know that he is no ordinary man. He will pass through a danger scatheless where another would be crushed. As yet he has invariably proved himself a match for Jonathan Wild."

"There is some consolation in that reflection, but still my heart is full of fear."

"All will be well; believe me, all will be well. When you come to think of it, the enterprise upon which Blueskin has gone is not at all a dangerous one."

"I should not think it so if we were all three together, but it is the separation which I dread."

"That is only natural."

"Oh! how hard it is that we should be persecuted like we are. And for what? Because I wish to regain possession of that which is rightfully my own, and, what is worse than all, both of you are involved in my persecutions because you have taken part with me against my powerful enemies."

"Do not grieve about that."

"But I do, and I cannot help it. But for me, and your unfortunate championship of my cause, how different would have been your fortunes!"

"I shall not listen to you if you begin to speculate upon that point. I am content with what I have done, and I am sure Blueskin is content also."

"You may be so; but if by renouncing my fortune and expectations I could procure your safety and pardon for the various offences against the laws which you have committed, believe me I would gladly—gladly do so."

Jack was much affected by these words.

About their sincerity he had no sort of doubt.

It was a minute or two before he could command his voice sufficiently to speak.

And then his utterance was husky and indistinct.

"It would not matter how willing you would be to make so great sacrifice," he said, slowly. "For my own part I could never consent to it, and I think I could speak with as much confidence regarding Blueskin."

"And would you pain me by refusing to accept to receive the only recompense I could make to you for what you have done?"

"We wish no such recompense. I could not rest with the knowledge that Jonathan Wild had achieved such a triumph. No—no. Dismiss the thought. Besides, if you were to make the offer, Jonathan would not accept of it."

"Why not?"

"He would not."

"It is my wealth he wants."

"But he wants revenge, too; and he would be villain enough to pretend to accede to your wishes and then betray us all."

"Oh! heaven. How can such monstrous iniquity exist?"

"It does; but why I know not."

As he spoke, Jack rose, and going towards the door, he opened it, in the hope of hearing or seeing something of his old comrade.

But he was disappointed.

He looked all around him, but not the least signs of him were to be seen.

Edgorth Bess rose, too, and came to the door.

She rested her hands familiarly upon Jack's shoulder, and looked out into the darkness with him.

"Is he coming?" she asked.

"I cannot see or hear anything."

"Nor I."

They were again silent.

The wind whistled through the dilapidated outbuildings of the farm-house with a melancholy sound.

A chill air swept over the face of the earth, and Jack and Bess shuddered before it.

As they looked around them, there came back to their minds a more distinct recollection of the scenery they had lately passed through.

Like Blueskin, they speculated upon the condition in which they found the house and grounds, but without being able to arrive at any reasonable conclusion.

"What a strange thing that was we saw in the lane just before we came here!" said Edgworth Bess, after a short interval of silence.

"Do you mean the suicide's grave?"

"Yes."

"It was a strange sight."

"It was indeed, and such a one as I should not care to look upon again. I wonder who the unhappy being was whose remains find there a last resting-place."

"That I know no better than yourself, though I confess I would fain learn something more respecting it than I know at present."

"And I too. It is an awful thing when you reflect upon it, and how close it is to this strangely deserted place."

Jack startled slightly as Edgworth Bess thus spoke.

It had never occurred to him to connect the grave of the suicide in the four cross-roads and the scene of desolation which he now beheld together.

The novelty of the idea startled him, and the conviction that there was really some kind of connexion between the two, took firm hold upon his mind.

"It is close to this place," he said, half-musingly. "It seems scarcely a stone's throw from it. I should say with certainty that this is the nearest habitation."

"It seems so."

"I never thought of connecting the two as you have done, but no doubt if we could solve the mystery of the one, that would unriddle the other."

"Perhaps so."

"But speculation is idle. We have nothing tangible to go upon. You shudder too. It is cold for you to stand here. Let us go in again."

"Listen for Blueskin first."

Jack did so, but no sound came to his ears.

Turning away, then, he once more closed the door.

As they approached the fire—which, during their temporary absence had burned away to a dull red—both were startled by distinctly hearing a sound which could be likened to nothing but a long-drawn sigh.

Jack recovered himself almost instantly.

But not so his companion.

She clung tightly, and with every appearance of the utmost terror, to his arm.

"What—oh! what was that?" she gasped. "Tell me! Speak to me at once!"

"What?" asked Jack, with as much composure as he could muster, and professing ignorance of what she meant, although he knew so well. "What has alarmed you?"

"Did you not hear it?"

"What?"

Edgworth Bess passed her hand over her forehead.

"I thought I heard something—like—like a deep-drawn sigh."

"Indeed?"

"Did you not hear it?"

"I fancy it must have been the wind," replied Jack, evasively, "whistling through some crevice in the wall."

"There—there! again! Oh! what was that? You heard it, then?"

Another sigh like the first, such a one as would come from some grief-stricken heart, came to the ears of Edgworth Bess, and to the ears of Jack Sheppard, too, as she could tell by the start he gave.

There could be no mistake as to the character of the sound. Nothing but a sigh could have sounded like it.

A sensation, such as he had never before felt, crept over Jack as he heard it.

His breath came short and thick.

As for his companion, her agitation was extreme.

Again she asked her former question.

Her voice was low and faint.

"What was that, Jack? Oh! tell me what it was. I feel terrified to death."

"Quiet your apprehensions. You have nothing to be alarmed at. What I heard certainly sounded like a long-drawn sigh; but, as I said before, it is almost sure to be the wind."

A dull, red glow came from the fire smouldering on the hearth.

It lighted up indistinctly and imperfectly the whole apartment.

By the aid of this illumination, then, Jack Sheppard looked about him, but he could see nothing more than he had seen before.

"Sit down," he said to his companion. "Sit down, and compose yourself. Your alarm is groundless. Sit down, I pray you."

Thus urged, Edgworth Bess assumed a half-sitting, half-crouching position by the fireside.

Jack drew his sword, and stirred the embers of the fire together.

A bright blaze sprang up, and once more the whole apartment was thoroughly lighted up.

Edgworth Bess glanced timidly around her, but she saw nothing to excite her terrors.

"You see," said Jack, "that your fears had no foundation. Unquestionably the sound we heard is to be ascribed to the cause I mentioned."

As he spoke, there came for the third time a prolonged sigh.

There was in reality no mistake about the character of the sound.

It was such a one as would be produced by the inhalation and exhalation of breath from the lungs.

In fact, a sigh.

Jack knew this, but he dreaded to confess as much to Edgworth Bess, for fear her alarm should be increased thereby.

A cold, chilly feeling was about Jack's heart; he was oppressed with a vague indescribable sensation of terror of he knew not what.

Edgworth Bess drew close to him, and clung tightly to his breast.

She felt safe while she did so.

Suddenly Jack felt her grasp upon him increase in tightness, and, looking down, he saw that her face was convulsed with horror.

Her lips were open, and moved slightly.

But no sound came from them.

Her eyes were intently fixed in one direction.

Instinctively his eyes followed her gaze.

They rested upon the dilapidated crumbling staircase which we have already described.

But there was nothing in that to produce the effect he witnessed.

Looking more closely, however, he saw, close to where there was a bend in the staircase, a shadowy-looking figure.

When he first saw it the outlines were so faint and indistinct that it was scarce to be distinguished; but, as he gazed with a strange kind of fascination, he saw the outlines become clear and sharp, though much of the shadowy misty appearance which the figure presented still remained.

It seemed to be the figure of a female, for Jack could perceive that the lower half of it was enveloped in long flowing garments.

With straining eyes, and a heart beating at thrice its ordinary rate, Jack looked at this strange apparition, if such it was.

He seemed spell-bound.

As for Edgworth Bess, the whole of her energies were employed in gazing at the figure.

More and more distinct it became, though by what means they scarcely knew.

Not only could the whole outline of the form be now perceived, but that it was indeed the figure of a female—and a young one, too.

The face was plainly visible.

It was one of rare loveliness.

But ghastly white.

There was, too, upon it an expression of the most unutterable anguish.

Her hands were small and white.

One seemed to rest upon the massive balustrade of the old staircase.

Her dress was one such as Jack could dimly remember his grandmother having worn, and doubtless it was at that epoch that they were fashionable.

There was something very interesting in the appearance of this figure, and something very harmless, too, for who, looking upon those grief-stricken features, could have dreamt for a moment that the possessor of them would have done harm to any one.

CHAPTER CCLXXX.

JACK SHEPPARD OBTAINS A CLUE TO THE DESERTION OF THE FARM-HOUSE BY FOLLOWING THE APPARITION. The silence which prevailed in the ruined farm-house while the singular scene we have been describing took place is something which cannot be properly realized.

The breathing of Jack and his terrified companion was so slight as to be perfectly inaudible.

No sound came from the staircase where the figure of the young girl could be seen.

No sound had heralded her approach.

She seemed to grow out of the darkness.

And now there she stood, silent and immovable.

Jack Sheppard had heard much respecting apparitions, but he had disbelieved all the tales which had been told him respecting them.

Now he felt his disbelief in their existence rather shaken, for what could be the mysterious object before him but a spectre?

Moreover, the presence of an apparition would at once account for the ruinous and uninhabited condition of the farm-house.

When a dwelling gets the reputation of being haunted, it quickly lapses into decay.

Indeed, it would soon present all the appearances which that place presented.

Anxiously and eagerly, then, Jack watched to see what was coming next.

It could not be said that he was exactly frightened by what he saw; indeed, it is questionable whether fear ever really found an entrance to that bold heart.

Curiosity was what he really felt.

He was anxious to know how the adventure would terminate.

Edgworth Bess, however, whose mental organization was much more delicate and sensitive, was terrified to such a degree that she could scarcely contain herself.

She clung to Jack with a tightness which he would have found it impossible to shake off, if he had wished to do so.

The figure of the young girl moved.

But so slowly and so gently as to be all but imperceptible.

Still she did move.

Jack and his companion first became conscious of it by perceiving not only that more of the figure was revealed, but also that it was much lower down the stairs than it was when they first saw it.

It was descending, but with a slow, gliding movement, as though the apparition floated in the air just an inch or so above the stairs.

It certainly descended.

Now it was on the bottom stair but one.

As it approached, Edgworth Bess shrunk slowly back before it, until she was prevented from going any further by Jack, who stood close behind her.

The interest and curiosity which Jack had hitherto felt were redoubled.

In his earnest contemplation of the spectacle before him he forgot everything.

Forgot the peril of their situation.

Forgot the peril in which his comrade was, no doubt, placed.

In a word, every other feeling was absorbed in the contemplation of what was taking place before him.

He wondered whether the spectre was coming close to him, and then he asked himself, with some anxiety, what kind of power such a supernatural being would be likely to possess.

He felt that if she did come—if the apparition really chose to place her hands upon him—he could not help it. A strange kind of fascination rooted him to the spot.

Upon reaching the foot of the stairs, however, the apparition became stationary.

At the same moment the fire crackled, and a bright blaze sprung up.

The spectre was then revealed with greater distinctness than ever, and there could now no longer linger in the mind of Jack Sheppard the least doubt respecting the reality of what he saw.

It was no delusion of the senses.

There it stood, plain, and apparently tangible.

Moreover, it was seen not only by himself, but by Edgworth Bess, and it was quite impossible for them both to be victims of the same illusion at the same time.

With unabated interest, fearful of moving his eyes for a second, and straining them until they smarted and ached unbearably—Jack continued to watch.

The figure now turned half-round, as though it would ascend the stairs again.

But this movement, like all the others which it made, was perfectly inaudible.

There was not the least rustle or disturbance of the air.

And now, as she stood there in this fresh position, the apparition raised her right arm from her side, against which it had been placed.

Then, looking with a sorrowful and entreatful gaze into the faces of Jack and Edgworth Bess, she beckoned to them with her hand, as though she wished them to follow her.

At least so they both interpreted the action.

Again and again did the spectre repeat the movement.

Then she ascended the staircase a little way, and, turning round, beckoned to them again.

This put all doubts completely on one side as to the intentions of the apparition.

Seeing, however, that Jack and Edgworth Bess made no attempt to move, a look of still deeper anguish appeared upon the countenance of the apparition, and she repeated her signal to them with less equivocation than before.

And, perhaps in order that there should not be any doubt about her wishes, she ascended the stairs a little higher, beckoning with her hand at the same time that she did so.

The curiosity which Jack had felt now took a fresh and still more interesting turn.

It was evident, he thought, that, for some reason or other, the spectre wished him to ascend the stairs.

Perhaps there was something to be seen above that would well repay a visit.

We have said that Jack felt no fear.

There was nothing in the appearance of the spectre to excite such a feeling.

He resolved to follow it, no matter where it led.

As soon as he made this resolution he moved slightly, but he found himself quite unable to shake off the grasp of Edgworth Bess.

He struggled, however, until he stood fairly upright.

"Release me," he said, in a whisper. "Release me. See, she beckons to us to follow her, and I will do so."

Bess did not speak, but looked at Jack with an expression of the greatest terror on her countenance, and shook her head.

"But I must go—I will," said Jack. "It may be that there is something to be seen which it is necessary for us to see. And it may be that the time will come when we shall wish that we had gone to look, and thus put an end to all uncertainty upon the matter."

"Oh! Jack, I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of following her."

"Why so? There is nothing terrible in her appearance. She could not harm us if she would, and I don't think she would have the least inclination."

Bess was silent.

"Come," he said, soothingly; "there is nothing to fill you with so much alarm—nothing at all. Will you stay here by the fireside, and allow me to follow the apparition upstairs alone, or will you prefer to accompany me?"

"I would rather neither."

"But one must be. Look, she beckons us again to come. Let me assist you to your feet. That is it. Now come with me, and take my word there is nothing to fear."

Edgworth Bess permitted Jack to raise her to her feet. He put his arm around her.

"Fear nothing now," he said. "I can and will defend you from all harm. Let us prosecute this adventure to the end. Come."

Bess looked in the direction of the staircase.

There stood the apparition of the young girl, in the same position as she had last seen it.

It looked brighter and more distinct, she thought, and the expression of sorrow seemed much lessened.

Seeing her look in that direction, the spectre renewed its intreating gestures for them to follow her.

"Wait a moment, dearest," said Jack. "Blueskin's lantern is here. I will take it with me. Perhaps we shall have need of it."

"Oh! yes—yes. Take the lantern. It will at least be a consolation to us if we enter any dark place."

"It will."

Jack took Blueskin's lantern from the place where it had been deposited and lighted it.

Then, holding that in his right hand, and putting his left arm round the waist of his trembling companion, they both moved towards the bottom of the broken staircase.

A faint smile appeared upon the countenance of the young girl when she saw that Jack was really about to follow her, and she glided up the stairs until she was lost to sight where they curved round.

Courage and daring are, like cowardice and fright, contagious, and so it was that Edgworth Bess succeeded, in a great measure, in freeing herself from those terrors which had weighed so heavily upon her.

It seemed to her that, the higher up she went, the more free she became.

Upon turning the bend in the staircase they looked up and saw the same girlish, shadowy figure standing at the top of the stairs, and still beckoning with her hand for them to come on.

And now Jack was glad he had thought of bringing the lantern with him, for the portion of the staircase they were now ascending was profoundly dark.

The apparition glided away as they approached, all the time taking care to preserve the same distance between them.

When they stood on the landing at the top of the stairs, they found the spectre standing near a door.

Once more beckoning to them it disappeared.

Jack made a bound forward and flashed the light of the lantern upon the panels of the door.

There was no trace of the form of the young girl to be seen.

The door through which she had passed was close shut.

Up to this moment something like an idea that what he saw was not altogether supernatural had held possession of Jack's mind, but this seemed to dissipate it altogether. The door had not been opened and closed again, he was quite sure about that.

And if the figure had not passed through that door, where was it?

It had stood before that door and disappeared.

But where could it have gone?

That seemed to be a mystery, without Jack felt inclined to take it for granted that this was a supernatural visitation, and he was very loath to do that.

Edgworth Bess trembled, and her old fears came back to her.

"Oh! Jack—Jack!" she said, "do not let us tempt our fate any longer; let us fly from this spot, and leave it to those spirits who appear to have taken possession of it."

"No—no."

"Why do you say 'no'?"

"Supposing that what we see is supernatural, should you like to oppose yourself to those of whose powers of mischief you can form no proper estimate?"

"What do mean, Jack?"

"Just what I say, and no more. I think it perfectly clear that it was the wish of that figure that we should follow it here."

"I think so too."

"Then, do you not consider that it would be far wiser for us to obey the wishes of this mysterious form, so far as we are able, than to refuse what they require, and by so doing incur their resentment?"

"I did not think of that, Jack."

"Then I am glad I suggested it to you, for it may be the means of inspiring you with fresh courage."

"But, suppose this figure should lead us into some danger?"

"We must keep a good look out, and, when we see anything perilous, then will be the time for us to draw back."

"I understand you."

"So far we have come in perfect safety, and why not further?"

"Look—oh! look."

"Ha!"

While they were speaking, an undefined something, like a vapoury cloud, appeared before the door which faced them.

It was, however, only for a moment that it retained this cloud-like appearance.

It gradually solidified itself, so to speak, and there stood before them the same figure they had previously seen.

There was not visible upon her countenance any expressions of impatience at their delay.

On the contrary, she looked smiling and encouraging to them, as though she wished to persuade them to follow her.

Again she beckoned.

Jack stepped forward.

He anticipated what was about to come—he was able to do so now—and he fixed his eyes most steadfastly upon the apparition.

He was determined that not a movement that it made should escape his observation.

He directed the whole of the rays which came through the lens of the lantern upon it.

Then went a step or two forward.

Again the spectre disappeared.

She seemed to melt away, and pass through the door in the form of an impalpable vapour.

It was closed as before.

Jack felt not a little bewildered.

But now, wrought up to the highest possible pitch of excitement, he dragged his trembling companion towards the door.

He dashed himself against it.

It was fast.

Perspiration started on to his forehead, and streamed down his face.

No longer could there be any scepticism about the matter.

By no human agency could any one have passed through the door in such a manner.

This was enough to cause hesitation even in a bold breast.

But Jack did not falter.

Releasing his hold of Edgworth Bess for a moment, he passed the lantern from his right to his left hand.

Then he felt up and down the door for a fastening.

His hand quickly encountered one of those rude drop-latches, such as are even now to be found in old-fashioned country houses.

He pressed upon the thumb-piece, and found the latch rose freely up.

It was an anxious moment.

The least pressure, and the mysterious door would swing open.

CHAPTER CCLXXXI.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE RUINED FARM-HOUSE AND FULLY REVEALED TO JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS.

What was beyond?

That was the question which involuntarily rose up in Jack's mind.

Naturally enough, now that he felt he had the power to do so, he hesitated for a moment before he opened the door.

Strange thoughts crowded thickly in his mind.

But, banishing them by an effort, he flung the door open.

It creaked back mournfully upon its hinges.

A kind of faint twilight filled the room, and Jack was quite at a loss to think from whence it came.

Just over the threshold he saw the same figure once again.



[JONATHAN WILD TAKES BLUESKIN A PRISONER TO LONDON.]

She still motioned them to follow.

Urged on by an irresistible curiosity, Jack once more placed his arm round his companion's waist, and led her forwards.

Once over the threshold of the door, the light was revealed.

In the roor above there was a large breach, through which the night sky, covered with drifting clouds, could be seen.

Jack cast a hasty glance around him, and saw that the place in which he stood was an ordinary-looking chamber, though of rather unusual size.

It seemed to be almost destitute of furniture.

The apparition glided along the floor of this room, followed by Jack and Bess, feverishly impatient to know the sequel of this strange adventure.

In one corner of this room was what looked like a large closet or cupboard.

Towards this point the spectre appeared to direct her steps.

She halted, however, when within a few paces of it.

Jack and Bess halted, too.

The figure turned round towards them, and then, raising her right hand, she pointed, with a significant gesture, to the cupboard.

Having done this, she turned away, and glided in the direction of a dark corner.

Jack followed her, fearful that he should lose her, and things be left in their present unsatisfactory condition.

The corner, too, was not suffered to remain long in darkness, for he directed the beams of his lantern into it.

He could see nothing, however, but a confused heap of something, but of what he could not say.

Towards this indistinguishable heap the spectre pointed, and then began gliding rapidly across the room.

Fain would Jack then and there have stepped forward and ascertained what it was that lay in the corner, but he feared to take his eyes off the spectral form for a single moment, and, when he saw it going in the direction of the door, he followed it.

From time to time the young girl turned round and beckoned them on.

Jack told himself that there was something more to be seen.

Supporting his half-fainting companion, for the scene we have described was too much for Edgworth Bess to stand, Jack followed the apparition out of the room on to the landing, from the landing to the stairs, and down the stairs into the apartment in which they had previously been sitting.

The fire upon the hearth was now almost burnt out for want of fuel.

If it was not quickly attended to, it would expire altogether.

The light that now came from it was quite insignificant, so that the lantern was again useful.

Jack stopped at the bottom of the stairs.

The apparition glided across the kitchen in the direction of the fire.

Upon reaching this she paused.

The red light of the fire shone upon her with a strange and weird-like effect.

Once more she turned her face towards Jack and his companion, to make sure their attention was fixed upon her.

Then, with precisely the same movement, she raised her arm, and pointed down upon the hearth in the same way as she had pointed twice before upstairs.

She stood in this attitude for a moment, and then faded away like an evening vapour upon the surface of a lake.

Jack Sheppard uttered an exclamation, and, at the same moment, Edgworth Bess fainted away.

His attention was thus instantly distracted.

He had no thought now for anything but his insensible companion.

He carried her towards the fire, and laid her down at full length upon the floor.

He had no means at hand for recovering her from her swoon.

Quick as thought Jack ran to the door, and passed out into the night air.

He recollected how heavily it had been raining, and he thought he should find water somewhere very close at hand.

In this expectation he was not disappointed.

Some kind of stone vase lay just outside the door, and in this a quantity of water had collected.

The vase was too heavy for him to lift, so Jack took off his hat and dipped it in.

It was made of felt, and was waterproof.

In this he carried the water.

A few drops sprinkled into the face of Edgworth Bess had the effect of restoring her to consciousness.

As soon as this happy result was attained, Jack raised her up.

The poor girl passed her hands confusedly over her eyes, as if by that means she could clear her mental vision.

"I—I have had such a dreadful dream, Jack—such a dreadful dream! I am so glad it is only a dream!"

"Are you, dearest?"

"Yet no; I recollect all now. Memory has properly come back to me. It was no dream, Jack—it was no dream! I remember. It was no dream; was it?"

"I am not quite sure what you allude to."

"I mean, Jack, it was no dream that we followed that figure upstairs into the room above. That was no dream; I remember all the circumstances too well."

"No, it was not a dream," replied Jack, "without we are dreaming now."

"And we certainly are not."

"We are not."

"Oh! would that Blueskin would return, so that we could leave this dreadful place! Where, oh! where can he be?"

"Calm yourself, dear one. You are in a state of dreadful excitement—calm yourself. Blueskin has not returned, but I expect him every moment. Perhaps he has had to go a long way for provisions."

"He has been absent a long time."

"He has, indeed, but we must wait here until his return. He told us not to be surprised if we had to wait until daybreak."

"I know he did."

"Then, again I say, be calm. You have really nothing to fear. You swooned; that was all."

"That form! Oh! Jack, what does it all mean? What do you think of the strange things we have seen?"

"Try to be less agitated, and then we will talk together upon this subject, and endeavour to come to a conclusion."

"I am calm now, Jack—I am, indeed. Talk to me—pray talk to me."

"I will. Do you remember how we heard the sighs, and how we saw the figure of a young girl upon the stairs?"

"Oh! yes; I remember every incident connected with it. Jack!"

"What, dearest?"

"Can it be possible that there are such things as spirits—apparitions—call them what you will?"

"I have always been taught to disbelieve in their existence."

"And so have I."

"But numberless well-authenticated cases are on record which go far to prove the contrary; but there are many who disbelieve these narratives."

"What are we to think of what we have seen?"

"There is the mystery. It may be that we are to settle the question beyond all doubt. What we have seen is very strange, and was witnessed by both of us at the same time."

"Oh! yes; and, therefore, it is impossible that we should both have fallen into the same error."

"Just so. Now, if you were willing, there is something which I should very much like to do."

"What is it, Jack?"

"To investigate this matter thoroughly."

"In what way?"

"I will explain to you."

"Do so."

"The behaviour of the figure we saw was very extraordinary."

"It was, indeed."

"How desirous it seemed to be that we should follow it upstairs, and how pleased it seemed to be when we moved towards the bottom of the staircase."

"I think there can be no doubt about the desire of the figure."

"None, I think. And now, what do you make of its actions?"

Bess shuddered.

"The door," she said.

"Ah! the door. That is a difficult point. The figure passed through it at pleasure while closed."

"And that seems to prove the supernatural character of this visitation."

"At first sight it does, but I should not like to take it for granted that it was so on such grounds alone. The figure certainly passed through the door, and now do you remember what the figure did after we crossed the threshold of the room?"

"I think I do."

"You seemed to be in a half-fainting state, and I thought perhaps you might only retain in your mind a confused and imperfect recollection of what took place. The figure glided towards a cupboard at one side of the fireplace. Then, halting a few paces from it, she turned round and looked at us, and then pointed to it with her finger."

"She did."

"Then, apparently assured that we had seen her, she glided to a dark corner in which I could just distinguish a mass of something, and she pointed at that too."

"I remember it."

"Then we followed her downstairs, and, going to the fire, she repeated the same actions and disappeared."

"Then, Jack, then I must have fainted."

"You did, dearest, and I restored you to consciousness as quickly and as well as I was able. Now is there not something very mysterious about the behaviour and actions of this figure, independently of the strangeness of its appearance?"

"Very, indeed."

"I think so. You may depend there was and is a deep meaning in it all."

"But what?"

"That is just what I should like to find out."

"How?"

"I will tell you, and I hope you will not oppose me in any way. First, however, I ought to state my belief that the figure meant by showing us those different places, that we were to explore them."

"That—that is the interpretation which I put upon it."

"It is, I fancy, the only interpretation that can be put upon it. You will understand what I wish now. It is to first of all go to the cupboard upstairs at which the figure pointed, and find out what it contains."

"Oh! Jack. Who knows what peril and danger there might be in such a course, or what terrible sights might meet your eyes?"

"Never mind that. Or, if you wish it, I will leave you here while I go upstairs alone."

"No—no. I cannot consent to that."

"I thought you would not. There is, then, but one other alternative, and that is, to ascend with me. I should like you to do so very much. Come!"

"I will, Jack. I feel timid and apprehensive, but curious. I should like to know what there is to be found."

"And I. If we were to leave this place without making the exploration I speak of, it would haunt me to my dying day."

"I will come with you."

Jack was glad that Edgworth Bess gave her consent.

He did not like to do anything to which she was opposed, and he would not have felt at ease in his mind if he left her downstairs while he went above.

He lost no time now, for fear she should change her mind, and, moreover, he was impatient in the extreme to know what discoveries awaited him.

He fully anticipated finding something which would amply repay him for his trouble.

The lantern was still alight, but burning dimly.

Hastily, however, he retrimmed the wick and closed the slide.

Edgworth Bess trembled excessively.

She could not control the tremor of her limbs.

Such agitation, under such circumstances, is nothing but natural.

Jack put his left arm round her waist, and then she experienced a feeling of safety which nothing else could have produced.

She had great faith in Jack's power to save her from all harm, and it is to this fact that we must account for her consenting to accompany him in his search in the room above.

There are few, we fancy, who would have behaved with greater coolness, under such circumstances as we have described, than Jack Sheppard.

He had preserved his coolness throughout the adventure, though he might fairly enough have been pardoned if he had lost it.

With a clear head and mind he had weighed every event, and arrived at his conclusions by logical deductions.

His heart, however, now beat at a more rapid rate as he walked towards the foot of the staircase with the lantern in his hand.

The silence of the place now seemed to increase, and every movement they made became painfully audible.

Edgworth Bess had some difficulty in preserving her composure, but by continual efforts she succeeded in doing so.

More than once they paused in their ascent and listened, as some faint sound would fall upon their ears.

At length the landing was reached.

After a moment's hesitation it was crossed.

Then they entered the mysterious room, in which something more startling and terrible than Jack even conceived awaited them.

A chill struck to them—seeming to penetrate to their hearts—as they crossed the threshold, and through the hole in the roof they could hear the wind whistling mournfully.

Unheeding this, Jack took his course in a direct line across the blackened flooring to the cupboard door, nor did he pause until he stood close before it.

Then he cast the beams of the lantern more fully upon it.

What would that cupboard-door disclose when he opened it?

His heart beat fast as he asked himself the question.

CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

JACK SHEPPARD DISCOVERS IN THE CUPBOARD THE CONFESSION OF THOMAS DOLEMAN.

A CLOSER examination of the cupboard door, by the aid of the lantern, showed Jack that it was shut but not fastened, and that he had nothing more to do than to insert his fingers in the crevice, and pull it back upon its hinges.

The action would be a simple enough one, but yet Jack hesitated to perform it.

The probability is, that if he had had some difficulty in unfastening the door—if he had had to use some violence, this feeling would have been wanting.

It was the consciousness that he had so little to do that made him for a moment draw back.

Ashamed, however, of his hesitation, and determined to give way to it no longer, he put out his hand and flung open the cupboard.

No words can portray the eagerness with which both he and his fair companion glanced into the recess which was disclosed.

To their disappointment and vexation, however, nothing but bare shelves met their gaze.

What they had expected would be hard indeed to say. Perhaps no very definite idea filled their minds, but certainly they were not prepared to see nothing.

Dust had accumulated in large quantities, and the interior seemed pitchy dark.

Beyond that there was nothing to be seen.

Jack Sheppard drew a long breath and stepped back a pace, as he said—

"What does this mean?"

"There is nothing there," said Edgworth Bess; "you see there is nothing there. Come away, Jack. We have been played upon in some way and deluded. Come away!"

And as she spoke, she strove to draw him away by main force.

"No—no," he cried. "I cannot, will not believe that all we have seen is mere jugglery—at any rate, not until I have more direct proof than I have at present. Release me. I must look more closely into the cupboard. Its secrets may be hidden."

Jack released himself from the feeble grasp of his companion, and was at the cupboard door in a moment.

Edgworth Bess kept close behind him.

He flashed his lantern into the cupboard, and the broad ray of light disclosed its inmost recesses.

But he could see nothing.

The walls were bare and broken.

The shelves had not a single article upon them.

Suddenly, however, his eye lighted upon a small packet or parcel.

It was not at all wonderful that it escaped him when he made his first examination. The wonder was rather that he should have seen it at all.

It lay on the middle shelf, and was quite close to the edge.

It was small and flat, and covered with dust like the shelf upon which it rested, and this it was that made it so difficult to be perceived.

A corner sticking up attracted Jack's attention.

He seized it in a moment, and then he saw the packet was a paper one.

It looked like a bundle of letters, and was tied round the middle with either a piece of tape or a piece of fine twine.

Hastily wiping away the accumulated dust, Jack looked more closely at the packet.

His eye caught some words written on the outside.

They were very faint, and assimilated so closely with the colour of the paper as to be almost indistinguishable.

By the aid of the powerful light which he threw upon it, Jack was able to decipher the following words—

"The dying confessions of Thomas Doleman."

He read them aloud.

Edgworth Bess read them, too, for she looked over his shoulder.

"Here is what we were to find," said Jack. "Beyond all doubt this is what we were to find. Let us find out the contents."

"Not here," said Edgworth Bess. "Not here. Let us go down into the room below."

"Agreed," cried Jack. "Take charge of it. I will look once more into the cupboard and assure myself whether that is all which it contains."

Jack did so.

But, though he made the closest search, he could not find anything else.

Although Jack had given his immediate consent to read downstairs the document he had found, he did not intend to leave the upstairs room just yet.

There was something more to be found.

He had noticed the corner to which the figure had directed its footsteps.

He had seen the dusky mass which lay there, and he resolved to make himself acquainted with its character.

Without saying a word to his companion, he walked steadily towards it.

She followed him.

Impatient to solve this part of the mystery, he projected the light of the lantern before him.

Not for long was he left in doubt as to the nature of the dusky mass.

A shriek of horror, which came from the lips of Edgworth Bess, told him too plainly that she also had seen it.

It was the body of a man.

But so far resolved into the elements of which it was composed, as to retain but few traces of humanity.

There were some, however, and the most prominent was the skull, which, as is well known, will remain intact when all the rest of the body has perished.

But here there was a loathsome mass, upon the exterior of which portions of clothing were visible, and it was these which indicated the sex.

Sickened and disgusted at this unexpected sight, Jack turned away.

The mysteries of the ruined haunted building were becoming more and more manifest.

Jack yet had hopes of fathoming the mystery completely, and learning how and why it was the farm and the farm-house were in the condition in which he found it.

Without speaking a word, however, he led the way to the staircase, which he descended.

Upon reaching the room below, they found the fire almost out.

But Jack stirred it, and replaced more fuel upon it, and then sat down to read the confession, which he was most impatient to do.

So impatient that he forgot to notice the length of time which Blueskin had been absent, or, if he did, he affected not to do so.

That some strange and startling narrative was about to be unfolded he could only reasonably expect, after what had taken place.

Resuming their seats, then, near the fire, Jack untied the bundle of papers.

There were several letters, but these he allowed to fall fluttering to the ground.

His attention was concentrated upon the top one in the packet, and which bore the superscription we have already cited.

It was a large sheet of paper, and much faded and discoloured with age.

Jack opened it hastily, and saw that it was covered with small fine writing.

In a hushed voice Jack began reading aloud, while Edgworth Bess looked over his shoulder and listened earnestly, while from time to time she would assist him to make out the obscurer portions of the document.

He read as follows—

"I have crawled to this place—the scene of my monstrous iniquities and crimes—to die.

"The hand of death, I can feel, is on me. I have but a few hours, perchance, to live. Those few hours I will occupy in writing a confession. When it is finished, I shall deposit it somewhere where it may be found easily; and then, at last, justice will be done to her who has suffered so much from my villainy and wickedness.

"Execrations will, no doubt, be heaped upon my head when the dark transactions of the past are thus laid bare to light, but I have at least the consolation of knowing that I shall not hear them, let them be ever so loudly uttered.

"That consideration which has caused me to keep silent

for so long will exist no longer, and now I will do what tardy justice I can.

"It does not lie either in my power, or in the power of any living man, to bring the dead back to life; or I would gladly—oh! how gladly!—make reparation for my crimes by so doing.

"That being denied me, however, I must do all I can.

"Unluckily for me, that all is but little.

"I can remove the load of infamy which rests upon the fame of one who was really spotless.

"I can remove it from the breast of the innocent one upon which it now rests, and place it where it deserves to be.

"When I have done that, I shall feel that I can die more content.

"There will be many who will recollect when this farm was one of the best kept and most productive in the county; and when its owner and occupier, Thomas Doleman, was a well-to-do and respected man.

"But there are few indeed who would recognise him in the miserable wretch who has crawled into this place to die.

"And yet it is so.

"I will begin my confessions by relating the principal facts of my life just as they occurred, and without any exaggeration whatever.

"That they are every one true, I solemnly swear.

"I do this and say this because many of the facts are already well known, but they are nearly all clouded with misrepresentations, while some are stated which are utterly false and without foundation.

"All doubt and uncertainty will then be removed.

"To begin. This farm, which has been so long neglected and left to ruin, is mine—mine by inalienable right—I inherited it from my father, whose only son I am.

"For a long time all went well with me. I was lucky with my crops and farming-stock, and everything seemed to prosper that I took in hand. I bore an excellent character, and was respected by every one for miles and miles round.

"That was a happy time.

"As my circumstances were so good, and as I was a young man of five-and-twenty, I received plenty of invitations from those who dwelt around me, and I have reason to believe that I should not have been unacceptable to any of their marriageable daughters.

"But I turned my back upon all of them—my affections were already fixed.

"The object of my devotion was, however, very far beneath me, so far as worldly circumstances are concerned, but she was rich in beauty, and in all those qualities which adorn a woman.

"At the time when I first felt a passion for her she was about eighteen years of age—that period when a woman's personal attractions are in the meridian.

"This young girl then fulfilled a menial position in my household.

"But, though her station was now so low, it had not always been so. Her family had been reduced by misfortune, and now she was forced to earn her own livelihood.

"So far as birth was concerned, she was quite my equal.

"I thought of all this at first, and determined, if I could win her affections, to marry her honourably.

"Would that I had kept to that good resolution, but my evil spirit prompted me to depart from it, and I listened to his suggestions.

"As I had prospered in all my other undertakings, so did I prosper in this. The young girl, although she was pleased with my advances, recalled to my recollection the difference in the position there was between us.

"But I need not linger over this part of my story. It can do no good, and I have not the patience to write it. Let it suffice to say that I won her love, and that I promised her marriage.

"At the time I made that promise, I now, after all that has occurred, solemnly declare I was perfectly in earnest, and that my intentions towards her were strictly honourable.

"In a little while, however, when I was quite sure I had taken a hold of her affections, as I have already hinted, I listened to the promptings of my evil genius.

"I continued my attentions to her, but no longer in the same honourable spirit. What need was there, I asked, to marry her?"

"When I once got to this frame of mind, you will be able to guess the rest. After a long struggle and protracted resistance, I overcame her virtue, though I did not throw off the mask as yet.

"I still promised her marriage, though I had not the remotest intention of adhering to that promise.

"In a word, she became mine, and, at length, she by degrees learned the truth.

"She learned that I had acted like a villain to her.

"At first she was frantic, but by degrees the violence of her grief abated.

"Time passed on, and then a child was born.

"Her shame could now no longer be concealed, but the birth of her boy seemed to reconcile her to her fate.

"Things went on thus for four years, and then a circumstance occurred which altered the whole aspect of affairs.

"Some very wealthy people came down from London to reside in a large house which they had built for their own occupation on a piece of ground which adjoined my farm.

"I soon became acquainted with them.

"They had one child, a daughter—a young girl just budding into womanhood.

"She was, of course, the sole heiress of all their wealth.

"No sooner did I see her than I fell violently in love with her.

"She was not only very beautiful, but rich.

"And I was tired of my victim.

"At least, I became so as soon as I saw the heiress.

"As her parents and herself were strangers in the country, they knew nothing of my child and my mistress.

"It would never do for any knowledge of them to reach their ears.

"I was convinced if they did there would be an immediate and final end to my suit.

"The inference from this I thought was clear.

"Both she and her child must be disposed of.

"But how?"

"That was the question that occupied my mind day and night, and to which I vainly sought to frame an answer.

"My evil spirit soon appeared, however, and put a diabolical scheme into my head, by which I could achieve my purpose!"

CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

THE CAUSE OF THE DESERTION AND SUPERNATURAL VISITATION OF THE RUINED FARM-HOUSE ARE LAID BEFORE THE READER.

JACK paused.

He had read all that was contained on the first piece of paper—closely written as it was.

He drew a long breath.

His interest in the strange story he was becoming acquainted with was most intense, and it was with a feverish eagerness that he turned over the other papers in the packet in order to find where the confession was continued.

The interest felt by Edgworth Bess was by no means less than her companion's, and she was quite as anxious as he was to find the next scrap of paper.

At length they discovered it, and then Jack resumed reading.

"The plot which I conceived, and which was elaborated in my mind with fiend-like rapidity, was of such an awful character that I shudder when I describe it.

"But it can be described in a few words.

"I determined to murder the child, and contrive to have her accused and convicted of the crime.

"No sooner had I resolved upon this devilish plot, than I resolved to put it into execution.

"One night I took opportunity to obtain possession of the child, and, having done so, I murdered it.

"Yes, that is the word—I murdered it. I destroyed its little innocent life, and so far I, told myself, I had succeeded in my plans,

"My next step was to get my victim accused of the crime, and in doing this I was also successful.

"In vain she protested her innocence, and was distraught

with grief. She was not believed, but hurried to a cell, and there left.

"I fancy now, in thinking over the past, that she must have either known or suspected the truth; but, if so, not a word did she utter concerning it.

"On the morning following her incarceration her cell was visited, and then it was discovered that, during the night, she had committed suicide.

"She was quite dead.

"I had not anticipated this. I then looked upon it as a stroke of good fortune. I was comfortably rid of mother and child, and I had nothing more to do than to prosecute my suit with the heiress.

"I was spared the hazard of a trial, for I had reckoned upon it, and had calculated upon her execution.

"My blood turns cold in my veins now that I recall the thought of the past, and it seems impossible that I could ever have been guilty of such deeds in thought or act.

"But it was so.

"There was, of course, an inquest upon the body of the poor mother.

"The verdict of the jury was, that she had committed suicide while fully conscious of her actions.

"The result of such a verdict is, of course, known to all.

At midnight her poor remains were consigned to a grave rudely dug in the centre of four cross roads. A hedge-stake was driven through her breast, and a stone placed over her face.

"Then the grave was filled up, and a mound of stones placed over it, so that all might know it was the grave of a suicide.

"I was a fool to think, as I did, that I should not reap the consequences of my evil deeds. I thought I should have gone on prospering, but I soon awoke to a consciousness of my mistake.

"In vain I strove to banish from my mind all recollection of the murdered mother and her child.

"By day—by night—every moment, sleeping or waking, their images appeared before me, until earth became hell.

"The aspect of the farm became hateful to me. There was scarcely a part of it that did not command a view of the desolate spot where she lay buried.

"Over and over again did I repent what I had done, but, like nearly all repentance, it came too late.

"Then there came losses, which succeeded each other with bewildering rapidity.

"The crops failed, and the cattle died off by hundreds in the fields.

"In a word, ruin came on with tremendous strides, and at length I fairly abandoned the spot where I fully thought I should live and die.

"I became a wanderer on the face of the earth.

"I have roamed through many lands, and many years have elapsed since the occurrence of the events I have described, and my crime has never been discovered, nor will it while I live, for the hand of death weighs with increasing heaviness upon me.

"But do not let any person delude themselves with the idea that, because my crime has been undiscovered, I have escaped punishment; that would indeed be a deplorable error for any one to fall into.

"What I have suffered no tongue could possibly tell; I have known what it is to have the curse of Cain upon me.

"My punishment could not be greater than it has been. I have felt that it would be a satisfaction and release to have the hangman's cord about my neck.

"But I have been compelled to live an outcast from my fellow-creatures, and shunning every look.

"What I have suffered no human being, save myself, has the least idea. My sufferings are, however, approaching a termination. My hour has almost come. I shall sit down in some obscure corner and there wait for death, having first deposited this confession in some place where it will be safe and yet easily found.

"No one knows of my return, and therefore how long the farm may be allowed to go to ruin I know not. The place has got an evil name, and it is believed that I am a resident abroad.

"I have no heirs, and I hope that the old place will never be disturbed, but allowed to crumble and rot away.

"And this I declare to be my last dying confession.

"Along with it will be found some other papers.

"There are three letters which I received from my poor victim, and also two different printed accounts, one of which charges her with the murder and the other describes her burial at the four cross-roads.

"And all the above I solemnly swear to be the truth.

"THOMAS DOLEMAN."

Jack ceased.

The confession was ended.

He allowed the paper to fall into his lap, and he gazed into the face of his companion for some minutes without speaking a word.

The narrative, with the particulars of which they had just become acquainted, was of so awful a character that they did not know how to comment upon it.

As for Edgworth Bess, she was quite overcome with horror. Never in all her life had she heard anything so terrible.

"What do you think now?" asked Jack, at length.

"Of what?"

"Of the strange visitation?"

"I know not what to think."

"We cannot consider that figure as a delusion of the brain. You see, we were taken to the place where this confession was deposited; otherwise, we should never have found it."

"No; and the awful figure in the corner?"

"Yes; and that, too. Evidently it was the body of the man who penned this confession. He says that he should lie down in some corner and die."

"And he appears to have done so."

"He does. There is little doubt about that, I fancy. There is one point, however, that yet remains to be cleared up."

"You mean the hearth where the figure disappeared."

"Yes. There is something to be seen there, if we only knew where to look. I am convinced of it, because the figure pointed there just in the same manner as she did upstairs."

"It is strange no mention is made of the hearth in the confession you have just read."

"It is rather so. I quite expected to hear something concerning it. There is no mention, however, made."

"Not the slightest."

"You were right, dearest, when you connected the suicide's grave with these ruins; for that the figure we saw was that of the young girl who lies buried there, I am afraid we shall be forced to admit."

"It is very terrible. Can it really be that there are such things as spirits?"

"I shall always believe so after what we have witnessed to-night. There is one point, however, upon which I must satisfy myself, and that is to ascertain what is beneath the hearthstone."

"But you have no tools."

"Then I will try what I can do without them."

As he spoke, Jack kicked the fire off the hearth, leaving the stone bare.

He had a sword by his side, and, drawing this from its sheath, he began to pick away the earth round the edge with it.

The ground was soft, and the point of the sword sharp, so that Jack soon had the stone loosened all round; then, inserting his sword-blade underneath it, and using it as a lever, he succeeded in raising it from its setting.

As soon as he could, he got his fingers underneath it, and then, exerting all his strength, he lifted the stone up and turned it over.

Some dark-coloured earth, pressed tightly down, was now disclosed.

Still making use of his sword, Jack turned this over, and dug down to some depth.

As soon as the ground was loosened, he would stoop down and lift the soil out with his hands.

Presently the point of the sword struck against some hard substance.

Upon being exposed to view it was seen to be a bone.

A small one, too.

Gently Jack removed the superincumbent earth, and then he discovered the almost entire skeleton of a child.

Edgworth Bess turned away with sickening disgust.

She could not bear to look upon it.

Jack, too, turned away.

The mystery of the ruin and desertion of the old farmhouse was no longer a mystery to him.

He comprehended the whole of the affair from first to last.

The one point which troubled him was the apparition of the young girl.

He did not like to admit the existence of spirits.

He clung as much as he could to the disbelief in their existence.

He would now much liked to have found that the figure he saw was mere flesh and blood, like himself.

And now something struck Jack which had before escaped him.

He had seen the skeleton buried beneath the hearthstone with great distinctness, but his thoughts were so much engrossed that he failed to notice where the light came from.

Now, however, he did notice.

It came down the chimney, which was wide and straight, so that anyone standing underneath it could see the sky above.

The light that came was daylight.

As soon as he saw this, he became suddenly conscious of the length of time which had elapsed since Blueskin had left them.

He had taken no notice of the lapse of time, but now he found the night had passed away, and that the morning had fairly come.

As soon as he made this discovery, his thoughts underwent a complete change.

He forgot in a moment all those things in which he had felt so great an interest.

Everything was absorbed in the uneasiness he felt respecting Blueskin's fate.

Where could he be?

What could have befallen him?

He surmised the worst.

He had long exceeded the time he had given for them to expect his return.

Full of uneasiness and alarm, which plainly appeared upon his countenance, and which communicated itself to Edgworth Bess, he hastened to the front door of the ruined farm-house and flung it open.

The fair and beautiful morning sunlight fell upon all things.

The new day had really begun.

Uneasiness now gave place to alarm.

Something must have happened.

Jack Sheppard passed his hands repeatedly and confusedly over his forehead.

What was he to do now?

The forebodings which from the first had found a home in the breast of Edgworth Bess, were now fully realized.

She had dreaded the separation, and it seemed to have produced the worst results.

In what way were they to direct their footsteps, or what course should they adopt for the best?

Sadly, then, with his arm round the waist of Edgworth Bess, Jack Sheppard stood at the door of the lone farmhouse, and cast a glance over the whole landscape spread out before him.

No living creature of any kind met his view.

With respect to Blueskin's non-return, all was mere conjecture.

He had nothing to guide him to a conclusion.

What had befallen him was hard to say, though he feared he had in some way got into the power of Jonathan Wild.

And this, as the reader knows, was just the fact.

But Jack Sheppard had faith in Blueskin.

He had seen him extricate himself from positions of great peril with an adroitness that was really wonderful, and even at the worst, he told himself, Blueskin could but be a prisoner in the hands of the thief-taker.

If so, all was not lost—there were chances, and many, too, of his making his escape.

But the desirableness of ascertaining whether Blueskin was a prisoner or what had precisely befallen him was well before Jack's mind, and he knew that that point must be solved before he decided upon any ulterior course.

The difficulties in the way of this were, however, many and various.

How was he to follow in his companion's track?

How was he to ascertain in what direction he had gone? Still he did not despair of finding this out.

In an encouraging voice he spoke to Edgworth Bess, and endeavoured to raise her drooping spirits.

Then a brief consultation was held as to whether they should remain where they were during the day, or whether they should set out upon their discoveries at once.

Edgworth Bess urged an immediate departure.

Not only was the farm-house hateful to her, but she was impatient in the utmost degree to learn what had become of Blueskin, in whose power to protect and aid her she had great faith.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIV.

BLUESKIN IS MADE A PRISONER, BUT EFFECTS A DARING ESCAPE FROM HIS CAPTORS.

No doubt the reader will think it time we took a glance at the proceedings of Blueskin, who we left in such a dire extremity, and accordingly we will turn from Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, and devote a little attention to him.

It will be recollected that upon their arrival at the suicide's grave, Jack Sheppard had heard the sounds of approaching horses' feet, and he fancied they were no other than Jonathan Wild and his gang.

Acting upon this belief, they had beat a precipitate retreat, and sought shelter in the ruined farm-house, in which they had such strange adventures.

Jack's supposition was, however, a correct one.

It was indeed Jonathan Wild and his gang, coming at full speed to that spot, and well for them was it that he did not find them there.

By his usual means he had ascertained their whereabouts, and got upon their track.

The rain poured down in torrents.

The lightning flashed.

The thunder rolled.

But Jonathan Wild cared very little for this elemental strife upon this occasion.

His mind was too much occupied with the thoughts of his revenge to heed anything else.

Then, as for his men, it was more than their lives were worth to lag behind, and they followed on in anything but an amiable frame of mind.

Wild, junior, too, accompanied the troop.

He had started of his own free will, but, now the weather had turned out so adverse, he heartily wished he had stayed at home.

He remonstrated with the "gub'n'r" upon the subject, and desired him to seek a shelter somewhere until the violence of the storm abated.

But his paternal relative had spoken to him in reply in such a hyena-like manner, that George drew back and said not another word.

If, however, the great Jonathan Wild had chosen to take shelter just where his son wanted him, the aspect of affairs would be rather curious.

The nearest place of shelter would have been the lone farm-house, beneath the roof of which our three friends at that moment were.

As it happened, however, they passed by, and so our friends were safe.

And now there is another thing which illustrates the perplexity and contrariety of human affairs.

Blueskin sought safety by leaving the cottage to reconnoitre, but, so far from finding what he sought, he only ran into danger.

If he had only remained in the farm-house, all would have been well.

Jonathan would have been baffled, for a short time at least.

Such, however, was not to be.

Jonathan kept on his way, and passed the farm-house when he ought to have entered it.

Blueskin left it when he ought to have remained.

The result of this is already to some extent known to the reader.

Jonathan Wild, after searching closely in every direction, at length came down a lane which would bring him into the high-road.

Just at this spot he paused, and called to his men to

halt, while he made up his mind in which direction he should proceed next.

While considering this point, there came to his ears, and to the ears of his son also, who was standing close to him, the sound of a footstep upon the road.

In a general way there was nothing wonderful in this, but there was on the present occasion.

The country road was very quiet, the storm was over, and there was scarcely a breath of air stirring.

Consequently this footstep could be heard with very great distinctness.

Jonathan recognised it.

It is well known that no two persons walk just alike.

Now, in years past, Jonathan had heard Blueskin walk hundreds of times.

He could always tell, when he sat in his office with the door closed, whether it was Blueskin who approached or not.

Jonathan had not forgotten the peculiar sound.

In a faint voice he communicated his suspicions to his son, and bade him keep a sharp look-out, in case it should prove that he was not mistaken.

Wild, junior, did not say one word, but took a pistol from his belt and quietly cocked it.

Then he looked with the utmost intentness at the little bit of road which the lane disclosed.

He made up his mind if Blueskin should make his appearance, not to have any more trouble with him, but to shoot him down at once.

But not a word did he say to his father concerning his intentions, because he knew he would never have consented to them.

Wild, junior, however, was tired of the manner in which his father was carrying out the business, and he determined to act a little upon his own responsibility.

He had no patience with elaborate systems of revenge. When he had a foe he was satisfied with his death, no matter how it was inflicted.

Blueskin was well known to him.

If he appeared he should fire.

Jonathan was too intent keeping watch to notice these movements of his son.

It was Blueskin who was approaching.

No sooner did he appear, and almost before he was quite certain who it was, Wild, junior, pulled the trigger of his pistol, and fired.

There was a loud report, and, when the smoke had died away, there lay our friend Blueskin at full length upon the roadway.

We have already related what ensued consequent upon this, and, therefore, there is no reason for us to repeat it here.

Some brandy from Jonathan's own flask was poured down Blueskin's throat, and had the effect of almost choking him.

But he recovered from his swoon, and the brandy having run partly out of his mouth on to the ground, and partly down his throat, he overcame its effects.

The wound he had received was really a trifling one, although it had produced insensibility.

The bullet had struck him on the head, and made a long furrow over his scalp.

In no place, however, was the skull fractured.

A quarter of an inch lower, however, and the bullet would have buried itself in his brain.

There was some water in a little stream that ran by the roadside, and one of Wild's janizaries filled his hat with the fluid, and poured it over the wounded man's head.

This had the effect of thoroughly restoring him to consciousness.

Still, at first, Blueskin had but a confused idea of what had taken place.

Gradually, however, all came back to him.

Then the harsh sounds of his enemy's voice let him know into whose hands he had fallen.

Summoning all the strength he possessed, he sprang with great suddenness to his feet, before any of Wild's men were aware of it.

With the same swiftness he drew his sword, and commenced a furious attack upon the bull-dogs who surrounded him.

How the contest would have terminated is unknown, but before Jonathan could interpose Blueskin felt his strength fail him.

His eyes grew dim.

Clouds of blood seemed to be floating before him.

His brain spun round.

Then his feet slipped from under him, and he fell half-senseless to the ground.

While in this state and while in this position, his arms were firmly bound behind him, so as to prevent the recurrence of such an attack.

"To London with him. Follow me to London!" yelled Jonathan; "and if he escapes your own lives shall pay for it."

"How shall we take him?" asked the men.

"You had better bind him securely," said Wild, after a few seconds' thought.

"We have done that, sir."

"Well, then, you can put him on one of the horses, and some one had better get up before him, and let the two be strapped together round the waist."

There was no demurring against this order, though, as the reader may be sure, the men were not very well pleased with it.

Some little hesitation was expressed as to who the person should be to whom Blueskin should be fastened, and Wild, perceiving some sort of discussion going on, guessed its character, for he said—

"You will take it in turn for your horses to carry double. You, Howell, will take him first."

Howell was, of course, obliged to give in.

He mounted his horse, and then Blueskin, with his hands firmly tied behind him, was lifted up and placed behind him.

It was perhaps intended as an additional indignity, or perhaps it was for the convenience of securing him to Howell's back.

Be it how it may, that was the mode adopted.

Blueskin was not altogether unconscious of what was going on.

He had a dreamy sort of notion that he was lifted on to a horse's back, but that knowledge seemed to content him, bereft as he was of all power of motion.

His arms were already secured, and he was attached to Howell by a couple of leather belts, which the man wore in such a manner that it was impossible for him to fall off the horse.

When all was ready, Jonathan Wild gave the word for the troop to set itself in motion.

He seemed now to have but one idea, and that was, to get to London with his prisoner as fast as possible.

It is rather wonderful that he should have done this, for he must have known that Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess was somewhere close at hand.

It was mostly owing to his son that he did this.

George Wild was one who liked to be on the sure side, and knew how to be content with a little.

He was quite satisfied now that he had captured Blueskin, and he judged the best course would be to lock him up at once.

There was a possibility, if they went off chasing the others, that Blueskin would find an opportunity to escape.

He knew him of old as being a slippery customer.

There was, then, a good deal of prudence and safety in the course thus adopted.

Away, then, they went to London—not at a very fast pace, because their cattle were already knocked up, but still they soon got over the ground.

After going some distance, Jonathan called for a halt, and then Blueskin was transferred to another horse.

The jolting he had received had gone a very long way towards recovering our old friend from his state of insensibility.

Still he attempted no struggle when the men came to lift him off.

He knew he was not strong enough for a struggle to be of any advantage to him.

Accordingly he remained quite passive, making not the least resistance.

But it must not be inferred from this that he had given up all hopes and ideas of making his escape.

The idea of doing so was topmost in his mind, and he was only waiting for his opportunity.

His wrists were handcuffed together.

But the handcuffs seemed to be large ones, and Blueskin thought it was just possible that he might slip his hands out of them.

There were very few though, who would like to make the attempt, for the feat could only be accomplished at the cost of great pain.

Steadily, however, he set himself to the work.

He slipped them over his wrists down on to the backs of his hands.

But he could get them no further.

It was in vain he tugged; he only tore the skin off, and caused himself the most intolerable pain without doing the least good.

In despair he placed his hands together, and then, with an exertion of strength, forced them apart.

The act was done in mere passion, but he was much surprised and gratified at its results.

There was a snap.

His hands were free.

The connecting link between the pair of handcuffs had snapped.

How it was he could scarcely tell; he did not appear to have put forth any extraordinary amount of strength.

There might have been, and probably was, some defect in their manufacture, or they might possibly have been tampered with, or weakened, or strained upon some previous occasion.

But, be that how it may, they broke, and Blueskin had his hands at liberty.

He was careful, however, to disguise the fact a little while.

The man behind whom he rode appeared to hear the snap, or else to feel that Blueskin had moved, for he turned round suspiciously.

But Blueskin took no notice, and never moved his hands once.

He kept still for some little while longer, and then he felt, if he was to make his escape, or, rather, if he was to have any reasonable prospect of doing so, now was the time.

The night was fast passing away, and already in the eastern horizon could be discerned a faint ray of light, which told of the approaching dawn.

Gradually Blueskin removed his hands from each other.

There was nothing now that confined him but the leather belt around his waist.

Gently he stole one hand into his pocket, and drew forth a knife, which he passed behind him.

While in this position he opened it.

The blade he knew was strong and sharp.

One vigorous stroke and the belt would be severed, leaving him so far at liberty.

His task then would be by no means easy, but he did not look too much at his difficulties and get cowed by them.

Holding his knife firmly, then, he placed the edge upon the belt.

Then he drew it across once.

The belt was severed.

The man to whom he was secured uttered a cry.

But, before he had properly given vent to it, Blueskin had slipped off the horse on to the roadway.

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

JONATHAN WILD RECAPTURES BLUESKIN, AND CONVEYS HIM TO LITTLE NEWGATE.

BRUISED and half-stunned, Blueskin reached the ground.

The two men who were following passed him with a rush, but, fortunately, they did not ride over him.

With the consciousness before his mind of the paramount necessity of being quick in his actions, he sprang to his feet.

But he staggered, and almost fell.

Recovering himself, however, with a violent effort, he started forwards along the road at a run, taking the route which he had just come, and which would take him away from Jonathan Wild.

That worthy heard the cry of alarm which came from the lips of his janizary, and, with a notion of what had occurred, he drew rein and turned round.

The remainder of the troop came to a halt.

"The prisoner—the prisoner!" they gasped. "He has escaped!"

A storm of curses came from the lips of the great thief-taker.



[BLUESKIN RETALIATES UPON JONATHAN WILD.]

"After him—after him!" he yelled. "Ten thousand curses! After him! He cannot go far on foot without your overtaking him. After him, I say!"

"Easy does it, gov'ner," said Wild, junior. "We shall have him again, never fear; he can't go far, and we must be quickest."

Without waiting to hear what his son said, Jonathan Wild struck his spurs savagely into his horse's sides, and galloped back in the direction Blueskin had gone.

His men opened right and left to allow him a passage through their ranks, but they were not quite quick enough in getting out of the way, for he rode up against some of them in his blind speed.

The result of the collision was another volley of curses, such as seemed always on the tip of Jonathan Wild's tongue in readiness to be uttered.

This produced a little delay, though not much.

Still every moment was of importance to Blueskin.

Hastily the janizaries formed themselves into a kind of troop, and rode after the thief-taker down the lane.

The wound in Blueskin's head, though not much more than a graze, still was sufficient to produce a very confusing sensation about his brain.

But that was owing to the quantity of blood he had lost. It still flowed from the wound, though not very rapidly. This was because it had coagulated into a large mass.

His hair was saturated with the crimson fluid, and it trickled down into his eyes and ears.

Headless, however, of this, Blueskin, as soon as he found himself fairly upon his feet, ran down the lane with all the speed which his enfeebled body rendered capable.

His course was very devious and uncertain.

At one time he seemed to be running full tilt at the banks on either side of the road, but he would turn aside just before he reached it.

In this zigzag manner he blundered on.

He was half-blinded and partially unconscious.

He knew, however, that he was running away from Jonathan Wild, and that piece of knowledge alone was sufficient to call forth all his energies.

And now upon his dull ear there came the most unequivocal sounds of pursuit.

He did not turn round to look behind him to ascertain how far his pursuers were distant.

A fresh accession of strength seemed to be imparted to his failing limbs.

Louder and louder, however, became the sounds, thus telling him only too plainly that his foes were fast gaining upon him.

But, animated with the power of a hunted creature, he sped along the ground with a swiftness that was incredible.

The rapidity of his motion, however, caused the wound in his head to break out afresh, and blood in large quantities began to flow from it.

This increased his weakness.

Each time, however, that he staggered, he would utter a cry, and bound forward with renewed fierceness, enraged at these symptoms of failure.

He ran on for some distance further, and then his strength suddenly and wholly left him.

He dropped down in the road as though struck by a bullet in a vital part.

At this moment Jonathan Wild rode up.

He had goaded on his exhausted horse, and got some distance ahead of his troop.

He was full of anxiety and dread lest Blueskin should escape.

As soon as he saw by the faint early light the prostrate figure in the roadway, he reined in his steed with so much suddenness as to almost throw him down.

The tired creature recovered itself, however.

Almost before it had fairly stopped, Jonathan sprung from the saddle, and placed his foot upon Blueskin's breast, as he would upon the head of some venomous reptile.

Once more he felt he had him securely in his power, and, as he made this reflection, he assumed a corresponding triumphant expression.

He folded his arms over his breast, and looked down the road after his followers.

They were soon upon the spot.

"How comes this?" roared Wild. "How comes this? Who was riding before the prisoner, and allowed him to get free?"

The janizary behind whom Blueskin had been placed shrank back when he heard these words, for he dreaded the worst.

His companions, however, who severally wished to disclaim having had any share in it, stood aside, and exposed him fully to the view of the thief-taker.

"Oh! it's you, Bumford, is it?" cried Wild, as soon as he caught sight of the janizary. "How was it the prisoner escaped?"

"I don't know, if you please, Mr. Wild."

"Bah! I don't please. You lie; you do know. He could not have escaped without your connivance and assistance."

"But he did, Mr. Wild, indeed he did. I felt him move about a bit, but I thought nothing of that, for I knew he could not be very comfortable; and then all at once he slipped off, and, as soon as he did that, I raised an alarm."

"And do you think I am going to believe such an unlikely tale as that?"

"It is the truth, sir."

"Well, it is lucky I have recaptured him. If he had escaped, your neck would have paid the penalty."

"Easy, guv'nor!" cried Wild, junior. "Perhaps what Bumford says is true. Let us see what kind of condition Blueskin is in, and whether it would have been possible for him to have slipped off the horse unaided by any but his own exertions."

"A good thought," said Wild, senior; and, as he spoke, he removed his foot from Blueskin's breast, who began to show signs of returning animation.

Jonathan himself turned our old friend over upon his back.

Then, stooping down, he picked up one of his arms, which he saw was at liberty, although they had been handcuffed together.

And, in fact, the ring of the broken handcuff still encircled Blueskin's wrist, and when he saw where the iron link had been fractured, Jonathan could not withhold his admiration.

Then Jonathan looked for the belt by which Blueskin had been secured to Bumford.

It was gone.

In the hands of the prostrate man, however, there still remained the knife by which the strong leather had been severed.

It now became tolerably clear that what Bumford had said was quite correct.

Blueskin had escaped without the assistance of any one but himself.

And now he was recaptured.

Jonathan determined that he should not escape a second time.

He called for a horse, and, when it was brought to him, he had the saddle removed.

When this was done, Blueskin was, by his directions, lifted on to the bare back of the steed, and, in a Mazeppa-like fashion, secured to it.

His legs and arms were securely tied to the horse, in such a manner that he could not by any means release himself.

The man who had thus been deprived of his steed, was commanded to take it in turns to ride double behind his comrades until they reached town, from which they were still distant.

Jonathan took hold of the bridle of the horse to which Blueskin was secured, and, mounting his own steed, resolved to lead him himself.

He thought, by the adoption of this means, to make sure of the safety of his prisoner.

Once more, then, the troop was set in motion.

Jonathan Wild rode first, leading the horse upon which Blueskin was tied.

His son rode close behind him.

The janizaries brought up the rear.

It was a singular-looking cavalcade.

Morning had now fairly come, and different objects could be plainly distinguished, but as yet the hour was too early a one for people to be abroad.

Very little was said on the journey.

It is almost needless to say that it was now quite impossible for Blueskin to make another escape.

Indeed, for the greater part of his journey, he remained insensible.

He did recover slightly towards the last, but only slowly.

The vital principle was very strong in Blueskin.

He was one not slain easily.

Upon him wounds seemed to make no more impression than they did upon the great thief-taker himself.

It was approaching mid-day when London was reached.

Many people stopped to look at the strange procession, and Jonathan soon found that he should have a mob at his heels by the time he reached Newgate-street.

This was certainly what he by no means wished.

A hackney-coach came lumbering along the Old Kent-road, up which Jonathan was proceeding, and Jonathan hailed it with sensations of the greatest pleasure.

The driver stopped, of course, and then he recognised who it was that had hailed him, for Jonathan Wild was as well known to the inhabitants of the city as the monument or London-bridge.

He was all obsequiousness instantly.

Jonathan dismounted, and released Blueskin from his hands.

In a state of almost perfect insensibility, he was placed inside the coach.

Jonathan got in after him, and by the direction of his father, Wild, junior, entered too.

The doors were then closed. The driver told to drive straight to Newgate-street.

The janizaries were to follow the coach as a kind of guard.

In this manner Jonathan succeeded in reaching his abode without attracting the amount of attention he certainly would have if he had persevered in his former course.

Blueskin was placed on that seat in the coach which is nearest the driver, and Jonathan and his hopeful son sat facing him.

Our hero looked about as helpless as any one possibly could.

He lay at full length upon the seat, and did not betray the slightest signs of life.

He was literally covered with blood, which still flowed, though very slowly, from his wound.

Wild's eyes glistened over his victim, and his heart filled with pleasure.

His foe was in his clutches at last, and powerless to raise his arm in his defence.

It was evident that Wild, junior, took upon himself all the credit of the achievement, and considered that he was the person to whom his father's thanks were due, for as the coach rolled on towards Newgate, he said—

"What do you think of it now, guv'nor, eh?"

"Think of what?"

Wild, junior, pointed with a significant gesture to the ghastly and bleeding figure of Blueskin.

Jonathan grinned.

"I told you which was the best way, guv'nor, and you see I was quite right. Just think what a desperate fellow he is. I don't wonder at your failing. He would hardly give in at the last."

"He has a brave spirit."

"He is a d—d troublesome fellow, if that's what you mean. Why, if it had not been for my little bit of a pop at him, you would never have caught him!"

"I don't know that," growled the thief-taker, who by no means relished being outgeneralled by his son.

"But I do, though. Supposing, however, that you had, he would have got clean away when he broke the handcuffs and cut the belt, if it had not been for the bodily weakness the effects of my shot occasioned."

"As it has happened, however, everything has turned out for the best. But, if you had killed him, George, I should never have forgiven you."

"Fiddle-de-dee."

"I should not—I could not."

"Just because you want him hanged?"

"Perhaps so."

"Have you some other reason?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"I do not despair yet of binding him to my purpose."

George shook his head.

"You don't think there is much chance of that?"

"With all due deference to you, guv'nor, I don't."

"Why not?"

"He is too determined a character. But you've got him, guv'nor, which you wouldn't if it had not been for me, and now I leave you with him to do just as you like."

"You have certainly been instrumental in his capture, George."

"Well, I should rather think I have, guv'nor. That's d—d cool, blest if it isn't. Instrumental indeed!"

"It was at this moment that the hackney-coach stopped opposite the regular prison of Newgate."

"Not there," roared Wild, projecting his head from the window. "Round the corner. Stop at my house. Not Newgate-street."

"All right, your honour."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVI.

BLUESKIN REVENGES HIMSELF IN A SLIGHT DEGREE UPON JONATHAN WILD.

ONCE more the crazy vehicle was set in motion.

But it required a very vigorous application of whip to make the horses start.

The distance they had to go, however, was but short, and they quickly turned the corner of the Old Bailey into Newgate-street.

With a jerk they pulled up in front of Jonathan Wild's residence, which adjoined the prison wall.

The thief-taker alighted, and was quickly followed by his son.

The janizaries hastily dismounted, and one of them knocked loudly at the door.

It was opened instantly by the man on the lock.

The people in the street who happened to be passing by stopped to look at what was taking place.

But a few of Jonathan's hyena-like growls, and questions as to what they wanted, had the effect of dispersing them, so great was the fear in which Jonathan Wild was held.

Blueskin was partially sensible.

So much so, that he comprehended what was said to him when he was told to alight, for he obeyed with promptitude.

He was giddy and sick, but he descended from the vehicle, and under a strong escort he was marshalled into the house, and the front door closed.

The coach drove off, and then not a trace remained to show what had so recently taken place.

By Wild's direction Blueskin was deposited on a bench in the hall, and Mr. Snoxall was sent for, and told to come with all speed.

Nothing would have vexed Jonathan so much as for Blueskin to have died.

He would have considered he was cheated of his revenge.

Therefore, as we have said, he did not at once consign him to the cells, but allowed him to wait in the hall until the arrival of the apothecary.

Very death-like indeed did Blueskin look, as with half-glazed eyes he looked vacantly about him.

Jonathan paced up and down the hall, scarcely removing his eyes from him for an instant.

He was thinking over his plans, and determining what course of action he should pursue with regard to Blueskin.

Through his politic brain flitted all manner of schemes, but none of which suited him exactly.

In the midst of his ruminations Mr. Snoxall arrived, for the apothecary was at home, and his shop was not two minutes' walk from Wild's house.

He started when he perceived what a spectacle Blueskin presented, and then gravely shook his head.

Jonathan touched him on the shoulder.

"Heal him. Make him well in a couple of days, and you shall have ten pounds for your trouble."

"Impossible."

"You will find it true."

"I don't mean with respect to the money, Mr. Wild; I know that's all right. You always behave very liberally to me."

"Very well. Do what I told you, and you won't have cause to change your opinion. If you fail, why, then?"

"What, Mr. Wild?"

"It will be the worse for you."

"I will try my best, Mr. Wild, and nobody can do more than that."

"I know—I know. But when a man tries his best he succeeds."

"But, Mr. Wild."

"What?"

"My patient is at the brink of the grave, and yet you give me only two days to restore him to health."

"You don't know him. He will soon show the effects of your treatment; he is not one of a dying sort."

Mr. Snoxall again shook his head.

He said nothing more, because he knew its futility by experience.

Gravely shaking his head, he called for several articles, which were supplied him.

They were water, vinegar, a sponge, and linen for bandages.

Soaking the sponge in the water, he carefully bathed Blueskin's head, and soon discovered the extent of the wound.

He found it to be a very trifling one, although it had bled profusely; and he began to have hopes that, if his patient was really possessed of a sound constitution, he should be able to do what Jonathan required of him.

There were some symptoms of inflammation, but not very serious ones.

He continued to bathe, and, with a pair of scissors he took from his pocket, cut away the hair.

All this time Blueskin sat quite still on the bench upon which he had been placed.

He knew what was being done, but beyond a dim and vague idea of this, he knew nothing.

He was in a state resembling that which is known as being between sleeping and waking.

Mr. Snoxall now poured the vinegar on the sponge, which was already partially saturated with water, and with this he began to bathe the gaping wound.

But the moment the keen acid came in contact with the nerves in Blueskin's head which the bullet had left bare, a result ensued which rather startled all present.

No one was prepared for it.

We say the contact of the sponge soaked in vinegar with the wound in Blueskin's head produced a startling result.

Uttering a yell so awful that it was quite sufficient to dismay any one, he sprang to his feet like one who is suddenly galvanized.

His consciousness was restored to him, but he was maddened to such an extent that he did not know what he was about.

As he sprang up he overturned Mr. Snoxall, who fell sprawling on the ground.

Jonathan Wild had been pacing up and down, but the awful yell which came from Blueskin's lips had the effect of arresting his footsteps and confusing his faculties a little.

Before he could recover himself in the remotest degree, Blueskin made one tremendous bound and stood before him.

With the swiftness of lightning Blueskin raised his arm, and before his old foe could be aware of his intention, he struck him a tremendous blow on the side of his head with his clenched fist.

The blow was well delivered.

There was a sharp sound, and then Jonathan Wild measured his full length upon the floor of the passage.

Blueskin would have thrown himself upon him and continued his assault—with what result it would be hard to say; but the janizaries, who had by this time recovered from the first shock of their astonishment, darted forward and seized him.

When they did so, they found him as strengthless as a child.

The fictitious vigour which the vinegar had produced vanished with as much suddenness as it had been called into existence.

Finding this to be the case, they simply laid him on the bench from which he had risen.

They then devoted their attention to their master.

He lay on the floor of the passage, just where he had fallen, without exhibiting the least signs of animation or returning sensibility.

George Wild, who had gone into one of the rooms on the ground floor, hearing the uproar, emerged.

All the surprise he felt was expressed upon his countenance.

He looked at the prostrate form of his delightful father lying close to his feet.

Then his eyes wandered to Blueskin, who, looking more lifeless than ever, was extended upon the hall bench.

Then upon Mr. Snoxall, who was struggling with his feet. Finally his eyes reposed where they had first rested—upon the body of the thief-taker.

This done, he gave vent to a characteristic exclamation.

"Well, I'll be d—d!"

Beyond this he did not trouble himself; but, putting his hands in his pockets, he leaned up against the doorpost, contented to watch the progress of affairs, which seemed to promise to be very entertaining.

The janizaries raised Jonathan Wild's head a little, and then they saw that he was rapidly recovering from the injuries he had received.

The bull-dogs, therefore, took good care to put themselves on their guard against any sudden attack which he might make upon them while only in partial possession of his senses.

And this caution was really requisite.

A howl came from his lips that would have done credit to the most ferocious and blood-thirsty animal ever created.

Then, with a bound, he stood upon his feet.

His men withdrew to a safe distance.

Jonathan glared around him.

Blinded with rage and passion as he was, he did not know what he was about.

The first person upon whom his eye lighted was the unfortunate Mr. Snoxall, who was coming towards him.

Impressed with the idea that this must be his antagonist, Wild rushed at him, and with one blow laid him prostrate, to the infinite enjoyment of his son, who could not forbear laughing aloud.

That laugh seemed to sober Wild's senses, if we may be allowed such a remark, and he looked more calmly around him.

A full recollection of what had taken place now dawned upon his mind, and, with his heart almost bursting with anger, he looked round for Blueskin.

Had our friend been at all conscious, it is probable that the thief-taker would have sacrificed him on the spot, at the expense of his more elaborate plan of revenge.

But when he saw the inanimate form lying on the bench, and presenting every appearance of death, his whole thoughts changed, and he became anxious once more that he should be restored to life.

Mr. Snoxall was more frightened than hurt by the blow he had received, and he now sat up, rubbing his head in a very lugubrious manner indeed.

"Get up!" roared Jonathan, with such tremendous lungs that the apothecary was on his feet in a moment.

"Get up, and attend to your patient."

Mr. Snoxall did not speak. He knew Jonathan Wild too well to think of saying one word.

He busied himself with attending to Blueskin, whose condition now looked more desperate than ever.

Jonathan resumed his moody walk up and down the hall.

He saw his son leaning against the doorpost, with his features distorted with a derisive grin, and he frowned angrily.

Of this manifestation of displeasure, Wild, junior, took not the slightest notice, except to say—

"Why, guv'nor, what the devil are you about? Who knocked you down, eh? Well, curse me, if you ain't a rum 'un!"

Jonathan made no reply, but his brow contracted into a yet blacker frown.

Finding that he could not irritate his father into making some reply or other, Wild, junior, once more withdrew.

As he paced up and down, Jonathan took care not to remove his gaze for a single moment from the countenance of Blueskin.

Mr. Snoxall's attempts at revivification seemed on the present occasion to be vain ones, but, at length, he had the satisfaction of seeing his patient open his eyes and gaze languidly about him.

Jonathan Wild saw this, and ceased his monstrous pacing up and down.

He came and stood before him.

Blueskin's eyes soon lighted upon the countenance of his ancient foe.

They sparkled and burned with fresh lustre.

He made one effort to rise, but it was a vain one.

He could not have been kept down more effectually if a mountain had been placed upon his breast.

And yet, when he made the effort, he thought it one sufficient to lift even a mountain, and he was surprised to find that he did not raise himself the thousandth part of an inch.

"The patient is very weak and bad, Mr. Wild," said the apothecary; "and all this excitement will have the worst effect upon him."

"What is to be done?"

"He must be kept quiet."

"Is his life in danger?"

"Great danger."

"But he must not die! He must live! I say he must live!" roared Jonathan.

Mr. Snoxall bowed.

"I will try my best. But it is a bad case—a very bad case."

"If he dies," muttered Wild, significantly, "it will be the worse for you."

"Then I must have him left entirely under my own control."

"So you may."

"Very well. I must have a quiet room, to which no one is to be allowed access but those I think proper to allow."

Jonathan hesitated.

He scarcely liked the idea of trusting to Blueskin being confined in a room.

"You need not fear his making his escape," said Mr. Snoxall, who appeared to read what was passing in his mind; "he is quite unable to lift a finger, and I will give you timely notice of his returning strength."

"Be it so, then," said Wild. "I have a room at the top of the house which I fancy is tolerably secure, and thither I will have him carried."

"That is the only chance he has, Mr. Wild. I must insist on perfect rest and quiet."

"Enough; you shall have them. I would not have him die for—the world. He will be valuable to me for some time yet. When he ceases to be so, he can die, and welcome."

Mr. Snoxall felt a disagreeable shudder pass over his flesh as Jonathan uttered these words.

Somehow he thought they were suggestive of himself.

What would be his fate when he ceased to be of any service to the thief-taker?

This was a thought of too unpleasant a character to be long dwelt upon, so he banished it from his mind.

Under his directions Blueskin was gently lifted up, and carried with all care upstairs to the room which Wild designated for his reception.

There was a miserable pallet in this chamber, and on this Blueskin was laid, and left to the skill of Mr. Snoxall.

CHAPTER COLXXXVII.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES A STARTLING PROPOSITION TO BLUESKIN.

WE should not be doing the apothecary credit if we did not candidly avow that he possessed very great surgical skill, and that in the treatment of wounds he was second to none, having succeeded in cases when any one would have stated recovery to be impossible.

We need not look further for an instance than to the unfortunate Steggs, of whom we have for a length of time lost sight.

The reason of this is twofold.

Firstly, attention has been required to events of the utmost importance; and secondly, Steggs was not nor had not been in a condition to appear upon the scene of action.

The wound which Jack Sheppard so thoughtlessly and hastily inflicted upon him as he was about to warn them of the approach of Jonathan Wild, was as near being a mortal one as any wound could possibly be which did not actually result in death.

He seemed beyond all hope of recovery, but he was placed by Jonathan Wild in the care of Mr. Snoxall, who did not despair of effecting his recovery.

The reader will be at no loss to divine the motives which prompted the thief-taker to be so solicitous about the preservation of Steggs's life.

His acute mind enabled him to penetrate far beneath the surface of men's actions, and he judged that, if he should recover, he should learn some very important particulars respecting Edgworth Bess.

That he was in the confidence of her and Jack Sheppard he felt almost convinced.

At any rate, he wished him to live, even if it was on that mere chance.

But there was another reason, which we cannot at present communicate to the reader.

We will return to Blueskin, whose position is at once sufficiently desperate and critical as to demand all our attention.

The various excitements and exertions he had undergone since he had received the wound were quite sufficient to change his character.

We said at first it was but a trifling one, and such was really the case.

Now, however, the case was different.

His system had been almost drained of blood.

This would produce fever and its train of concomitant evils, and heighten the inflammation which was already visible about the wound.

Mr. Snoxall, however, on the present occasion put forth all his skill, and the result was gratifying to no ordinary degree.

Some portion of the result must, however, be attributed to Blueskin's uncommon vigour of constitution.

We have lately had some notable examples of it.

Under the care of the apothecary, then, he mended rapidly, and by the time the second day arrived he was able to move slightly.

Mr. Snoxall earnestly exhorted him to remain still, assuring him that, if he did so, his recovery would be proportionably rapid, and adding, further, that his state was then precarious in the extreme.

Blueskin had the good sense not only to listen to all this, but to attend to it.

In a word, he obeyed Mr. Snoxall's instructions in every particular.

It was some time, though, before he could distinctly call to mind what had happened to him, but at length the transactions of the past came clearly before his mental vision.

His present situation did not give him so much uneasiness as one might have expected.

It was chiefly on account of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess that he felt anxious.

He knew how they would expect him, and how alarmed they would be when they found he did not return.

He dreaded, too, that this very alarm would be the means of bringing them into additional danger, and that they might fall into the hands of the thief-taker.

But he ascertained from Mr. Snoxall, who was afraid to cross him in any way, that Mr. Wild had not brought in any fresh prisoners.

Finding himself wounded and helpless, and learning also that the thief-taker ardently desired his recovery, he resolved, very wisely, to remain where he was until he had thoroughly recovered his strength.

Then, and not till then, he considered would be the time for action.

The many solitary hours he passed, he spent in thinking over his condition, and the prospect which he had before him.

On the third day he felt wonderfully better, but as far as possible he concealed his rapid improvement from Jonathan Wild, who came perpetually to see that he was safe.

Blueskin feared that, as soon as he was well, he would be transferred from his present quarters to one of the cells, from which place he would have all the more difficulty in making his escape.

Still Jonathan could see he was approaching convalescence, and he looked with increasing distrust upon the chamber in which he was confined.

He had it closely watched, however; and in this way tolerably well made up for its want of strength.

Blueskin now began to revolve in his mind various plans of making his escape, so that he could decide upon the one which promised best.

He must not delay the attempt too long.

What were Jonathan's ultimate intentions he had no very clear idea.

They boded no good to him he felt certain, for the thief-taker was the last man on earth to overlook what had passed.

The room in which he lay was, as we have previously stated, at the top of the house, it being, in point of fact, neither more nor less than a garret.

Blueskin knew this, not only by the general appearance of the room, with which he was perfectly familiar, but by the shape of the ceiling of it.

It was a strong room, though.

The window was strongly barred both within and without, and seemed to defy all attempts at removal.

Then the door was of massive oak, and strongly secured with every variety of fastening in existence, several of which had been added during his stay there.

It was only while he was wounded and weak that he was considered safe in this place.

Had he been only slightly hurt, he would have been chained in one of the strongest dungeons beneath the house.

Not for long, however, was Blueskin allowed to think over the various means of making his escape, for Jonathan as usual came into the room.

This was on the third day.

There was little to be gleaned from the ferocious countenance of the thief-taker, though Blueskin looked eagerly at it while pretending not to do so.

He looked much the same as he always looked.

He approached the bed upon which his prisoner lay, and for a few moments regarded him in silence.

Then he spoke.

"Blueskin," he said.

That was all.

Our friend took no notice, except to turn his face away. "Blueskin," said Wild again, "you are better now, and quite well enough, Mr. Snoxall tells me, to listen to what I have to say to you. I want to come to an understanding with each other."

Still Blueskin took no notice.

He never moved nor spoke.

But Jonathan's voice so changed the next word he spoke, that he feared if he did not respond in some way, he should be laying himself open to the ill-usage of the thief-taker when he was so weak as not to be able to defend himself from him.

Turning over, then, upon his side, he looked Wild in the face, and said—

"What do you want with me?"

"A little talk," replied Jonathan, with a calmness that had the immediate effect of putting Blueskin upon his guard.

He knew from experience that the thief-taker was most to be dreaded in his calmest moments.

That he had some deep-laid scheme in his head of which this was only the preliminary, he was certain, and with an amount of curiosity which he vainly endeavoured to repress, he prepared to listen.

"I am here, Jonathan Wild," he said, "and, thanks to you, in such a condition of weakness and exhaustion, that I cannot oppose you in any way. Say on; I am prepared to listen."

"I am glad to hear it, Blueskin, and I hope you will give attention to what I am about to say to you. It is a long time since we had anything to say to each other, but never mind the past. Are you listening?"

"I am."

"Very well. In the first place, there are a few circumstances to which I should much like to direct your attention."

"Go on."

"I would recall the past—I mean things which happened a very long time ago—not those which have lately taken place. Do you recollect what a many years we were friends, and the circumstances under which our friendship commenced?"

"I recollect perfectly."

"Very good. That will save me the trouble of repeating it. We were very intimate friends. I made you second to myself, and took you into my confidence upon every subject, and all went well. Am I right?"

"Quite."

"All went on smoothly, then, until an unfortunate day both for you and for me you introduced that young fiend in human shape, Jack Sheppard. Curses on him! From that time all has gone wrong. Our friendship and partnership came to an end. And there has been nothing but danger and distrust to both of us ever since, without either reaping the slightest profit."

"I am listening," said Blueskin, perceiving that Wild paused.

"I will take your silence, then, as an acquiescence in the truth of what I have just stated. From that unlucky day all has gone wrong, and from friends we became changed into deadly foes. I have often thought of this, and wished it were otherwise, and ever since then have I felt the want of some trustworthy and confidential person upon whom I could rely. Let me get to the end of this long preface and come to the point. I will tell you what I am willing to do, provided you are willing likewise. I am willing to overlook all the differences that have latterly occurred between us, and reinstate you in your former position. What do you say to my offer?"

"I reject it."

"Pho—pho! You have not had long enough to reflect."

"I have."

Wild frowned.

"What is the reason?" he asked. "Why do you refuse my offer?"

"Because I know there will be such conditions attached to it as to make my acceptance impossible."

"If that is all you fear, dismiss the thought from your mind. The conditions I require you to accede to are so simple that I am quite sure you will not hesitate."

"What are they?"

"Before I mention them I will make a slight addition to my offer. I have promised you shall be restored to your former situation, which is now indifferently well filled by Quilt Arnold. In addition to this, you shall receive a thousand pounds, and nine thousand pounds more when some little services are performed which you can easily execute."

It is probable that Jonathan Wild calculated upon dazzling the imagination of Blueskin by the offer of so large a sum, but, if such was his intention, he failed signally.

Our friend knew him too well to place the least reliance upon his words.

Observing that he remained silent, Wild continued—

"What do you think of my offer?"

"I should like to hear the conditions."

"They are these. You must place in my power Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess."

"Is that all?"

"It is all. And you consent?"

"Never."

"Eh?"

"I say, never. Jonathan Wild, I have heard you to the end for two reasons. One is because I lay here unable to move, and the other because I felt a curiosity to know what your proposal really was. I have heard it, and I now repeat, that never again can we assume the same relative positions as we have done. We have been foes—are foes still—and foes we must continue. You would be unable to trust me—I should be doubtful of you."

"Then it would be without a cause," said Wild, with hypocritical sincerity. You would have no cause to doubt me while you yourself remained faithful. Reconsider your decision, and weigh well my proposition. I am anxious that you should do so, and do not hesitate to confess it, because, in the event of your giving your consent and joining your fortunes to mine, it will make things much better for both of us. Therefore, I say again, reflect before you decide."

"I have reflected, Jonathan Wild, and I have decided, and no additional amount of reflection would have the effect of causing me to alter my mind. We must continue foes."

An angry look came across Wild's face as Blueskin thus spoke with so much calmness and determination, and there was a baleful sparkle in his eyes as he said—

"I will press the matter no further now. I will leave you, and you can occupy the interval with thinking over what I have said. As yet I have presented but one side of the case, the other will do on the next occasion. Once more, I say, reflect, and reconsider your rash decision."

Blueskin made no reply to this speech, but languidly turned over on his bed; and Jonathan Wild, imagining, doubtless, that he had achieved sufficient at a first interview, turned on his heel and left the room, carefully securing the door after him.

CHAPTER COLXXXVIII.

JONATHAN WILD MEDITATES THE EXECUTION OF FRESH AND IMPORTANT SCHEMES.

By this time the reader, if he happens to be possessed of any penetration whatever, must have obtained a tolerably good insight into the character of Jonathan Wild.

He will, therefore, doubtless be able to place a proper value and estimate upon the offer he had just made to Blueskin, and which, it must be admitted, was of rather a dazzling character.

Not for one moment did Jonathan Wild expect he should succeed in achieving his purpose on the first occasion.

He wished chiefly to give Blueskin's thoughts an impulse in that direction, so that, in the quiet of his chamber, he should be able to meditate upon the advantages he held out to him.

And then the thief-taker was provided with stronger arguments than mere persuasion.

But these he should not at present resort to, but avail himself of them from time to time, as occasion might require.

Slowly, then, he descended the stairs, until he reached his own parlour on the first floor, which he entered.

With a sigh of relief he saw that it was empty.

He half-dreaded to find his son there.

Somehow or other, Jonathan did not like his hopeful son.

His manners and his speech jarred upon him.

But dismissing as well as he could all recollection of him, the thief-taker seated himself at the fireside, and began to smoke.

From time to time he moistened his lips with brandy.

It could easily be seen that Jonathan Wild was in deep thought, though upon what dark project his mind was engaged it would be impossible to tell.

He was revolving a scheme in his mind, and now and then he would give vent to half-uttered exclamations.

But they carried no meaning with them.

His actions will shortly make the reader acquainted with the subject of his thoughts.

For some hours he thus sat and meditated, during which time his privacy was not once intruded upon.

When he sat down it was just beginning to grow dusk, but now darkness had completely descended upon the earth.

There was no light in the room save that which the fire afforded, and this was blazing bonnily.

The flames were stimulated now and then by being poked vigorously by Wild.

A strong, ruddy light was diffused over the apartment, and by the aid of this illumination Jonathan sat and thought.

The fire crackled.

It was the only thing in the room which had a cheerful appearance.

Dark thoughts were flitting through the mind of the great thief-taker.

The scowl upon his brow and the compression of his lips betokened this.

"It must be so," he said at length, rising from his seat. "It must be so, and to possess that knowledge I am determined."

As the thief-taker spoke, there came with great plainness to his ears the chiming of a church clock.

Involuntarily he listened and counted the strokes.

It was the clock in the belfry of St. Sepulchre's church on the opposite side of the way striking the hour of midnight.

Slowly the solemn sounds died away.

"So late!" muttered Jonathan, who, deeply occupied with thought as he had been, had forgotten to note the flight of time. "No matter, this hour is as suitable as any other."

As he spoke, Jonathan went to a cupboard by the side of the fireplace, and opening it, he rummaged for some time among the miscellaneous contents at the bottom of it.

At length he found what he sought.

It seemed like a stick about fourteen inches in length.

Its true character, however, became apparent when he thrust one end of it between the bars of the grate and ignited it.

It was a flambeau, or torch.

At first it spluttered a great deal, but it soon burst out into a steady flame.

A brace of large holster pistols lay on the table, and these Jonathan crammed into his coat pocket.

Then he poured out another bumper of brandy, and, having drank this off, he prepared to leave the apartment.

The house was profoundly silent.

Probably there were only two janizaries awake—the one who was on the look at the front door, and the other who kept guard at the grating.

Slowly Jonathan Wild descended the stairs.

The light of the torch sent a red and unsteady glare around.

It fell on the face of the man at the grating, and awakened him.

Wild gave a suspicious look round as soon as he reached the bottom of the staircase.

But, finding all looking just as he considered it ought to look, he turned round, and walked towards the grating.

He made an imperative and hasty sign to the man who sat there.

He instantly responded to it by springing to his feet, and inserting the ponderous key in the well-oiled lock.

There was a sharp click, and then the iron door swung open.

The flight of stairs leading to the cells, which must be so familiar to the reader, was then disclosed.

Down these he went with his usual deliberation.

As he went, he still kept muttering disjointed sentences, which carried no meaning with them.

He passed by the cell doors, and some of those gloomy recesses must have contained inmates who, aroused by the unusual glare of light, or else by the heavy footstep of the thief-taker, gave vent to loud shrieks and supplications for release.

Some cried for food, and others for water.

Jonathan Wild, however, stalked on, apparently without taking any notice, but he drank in every sound with a feeling nearly akin to delight.

At length he paused before one of the cell doors, and, after a moment's consideration as to whether it was the right one, he produced a master-key from his pocket, and, inserting it in the lock, flung the door open.

It creaked dismally upon its hinges, and, when that dreary sound had died away, it was succeeded by the rattling of chains and the rustling of straw.

Jonathan held the torch as high above his head as he could, in order to diffuse its rays as much as possible.

But it no longer burned with the steady radiance it had done hitherto.

Now it gleamed with a sickly lustre, for the foul air which poured out of the dungeon into the comparatively purer air of the passage, was but ill-adapted for the purposes of combustion.

Still the torch gave forth a very tolerable amount of illumination, and was amply sufficient to light up the small pestiferous cell.

It caused the massive stone walls to gleam with sickening brightness as it played upon the fungic exhalations with which they were covered, and upon the moisture which trickled down in streams, and collected in stagnant pools upon the flooring of the dungeon.

It revealed in one corner, nearly opposite to the door, a something which it would have required a second glance to pronounce was a human form.

But such indeed it was; so emaciated, so disgusting in its appearance, that we cannot describe it.

This human being, whoever he was, endeavoured to rise to his feet when he saw Jonathan Wild appear upon the threshold of the dungeon, but he found the strength he possessed was far from being sufficient for the purpose.

With a hollow groan, or moan rather, he sank back again upon his straw, and glared at the thief-taker with eyes in which the fierce fire of insanity seemed to burn.

He clenched a few pieces of straw tightly in his hands.

For some moments Jonathan Wild looked at the spectacle before him in perfect silence.

He did not move.

At length, however, finding that the prisoner did not speak, he said—

"You don't seem well, my lord."

There was something horrible in these words.

The mockery was hideous, and so, too, was the tone of voice in which Jonathan pronounced them.

The idea of such a loathsome and revolting object as that, which now crouched upon the dungeon floor, being a lord!

And yet such was the title that he bore—though wrongfully.

The reader, without further description, will recognise who this miserable being is.

Lord Donnull.

One of the thief-taker's victims.

It will be recollected how Jonathan enticed him to the cells and confined him there.

Since that moment he had never seen the light of day nor tasted a mouthful of wholesome food.

The reader can imagine the effect of this.

Surely Lord Donnull must now have been brought to the belief that there was something like retribution, even in this world.

What he had suffered during his long incarceration, no tongue, not even his own, could tell.

Too late had repentance found a home in that guilty soul.

Too late did Abel Donnull see how foolishly he had acted in taking the thief-taker into his confidence.

The mocking words which Jonathan uttered seemed to rouse his utmost fury, and rage lent him strength enough to rise to a half-sitting posture.

"Jonathan Wild," he said, in a faint, husky voice.

"Jonathan Wild."

"I hear you, my lord," repeated the thief-taker.

"Release me, villain! Release me, I say!"

"And do you think you are likely to gain your freedom while you speak thus to me? You are safe enough now. No more attempts at escape, eh? No. Sound enough in all conscience."

"Release me," cried the wretched man, his voice now changed to the most abject entreaty.

"What can you offer me by way of inducing me to do such a thing?" asked Jonathan, calmly.

"Set me free—only set me free, and you shall have all I possess—everything."

"Ha! ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"At the idea of your promising me something which I have already. All that you possess is mine."

"All?"

"Yes, all. Yet, stay; there is something you have which I want. Give it to me, and you shall soon be free."

"What is it?"

"You need not ask the question, since you must know from my repeated applications what it is that I do want."

Lord Donnull—we may as well, for convenience sake, call him by that title—was silent.

"You have secreted somewhere a bundle of papers of the utmost value to me. They consist of the will of your brother, together with other documents, all of which clearly identify the young girl as being your niece, and the rightful heir to the estates. Those papers, I am convinced, are in existence; but you have secreted them in some place where hitherto I have been unable to discover them. Tell me where they are, and you shall be set at liberty."

"Never, Jonathan Wild."

"Never, did you say?"

"I did."

"Obstinate fool! You cannot comprehend the purport of your words. Did you not desire your freedom, and yet you reject it when offered to you?"

"Jonathan Wild."

"What, my lord?"

"Call me no longer by that hateful title, which was once so delightful to my ears."

"As you please."

"I know you, then, too well. Unfortunately, that knowledge has been purchased at a high price—that of experience. Still, I know you, and should never dream of surrendering the papers upon the bare faith of your word to set me free when I had done so."

"What will convince you?"

"Nothing. I have resolved that no torture which you can apply shall extort the secret from me of where those papers are concealed; they are where you would never think of looking for them, and so they are safe—quite safe."

"Is this your determination?"

"It is."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then you are a fool. What harm can it do you to place the papers in my hand?"

"None to me, for you could not harm me more than you have done; but I have resolved that justice shall be done to my brother's child, and above all will I take care that you do not juggle the vast possessions into your hands. I will take care of that."

"Insensate fool!" cried Jonathan Wild, furious with passion. "Give up those papers, and save your miserable life. Refuse again, and the next moment shall be your last."

"Then the secret will die with me. No, no, Jonathan Wild; that was an idle threat. The only guarantee that I have for my life, the secret of the whereabouts of those papers affords me. Do your worst. I defy you, and will not deliver up those papers."

"You will not?"

"I have said it."

"Then, Lord Donnull—or Donnull without the lord, if you like that better—I tell you this. It may be that you think you have realized to its fullest extent the meaning of the word suffering. But I shall prove to you that, as yet, you have but a slight conception of it. Depend upon it, you will soon change your mind."

"Do your worst," cried the miserable tenant of the dungeon. "Do your worst."

Uttering a howl of rage, Jonathan Wild shut the cell door, and relocked it.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIX.

JONATHAN WILD TAKES HIS SON INTO HIS CONFIDENCE, BUT THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE PAPERS REMAINS A MYSTERY.

"CURSES on his obstinacy!" muttered the thief-taker, as he took his way along the passage towards the grating again. "Curses on his obstinacy! Why does he not deliver up those papers, or rather tell me where they are? I never anticipated so much trouble with him. But those papers I must and will have. They are indispensable to me. Once in my possession, all will be well."

He ascended the stairs as he spoke, and passed through the grating.

Without pausing or speaking, he made his way up to his own room again.

The fire was still burning, though very dimly. A vigorous poke, however, set that all right, and then Jonathan muttered again—

"Is it possible that he so well comprehends his position as to know that while he refuses to disclose the locality of those papers his life is safe? It seems so. But he shall be deceived. I will stir earth and hell but what I will discover them."

He banged upon the table as he spoke.

That was his usual mode of summoning any one.

Tonks appeared.

"Where's George?"

"Do you mean your son, Mr. Wild?"

"Of course I do, fool. Where is he?"

"Upstairs, I believe, Mr. Wild."

"In bed?"

"I think so, sir."

"Then go and find him, and tell him I want to speak to him."

Tonks withdrew without a word, glad enough to escape unharmed from the lion's den.

But he had another disagreeable course to go through.

George Wild was not of a much more amiable temper than his delightful parent, and if he was really asleep. Tonks rather dreaded the task of waking him.

With a slow step, then, and looking like a man who is on his way to be executed, Tonks ascended the stairs, and made his way to the bed-chamber which was occupied by Wild, junior.

The door was closed.

Tonks tapped gently at it with his knuckles.

The summons was disregarded.

He repeated it.

This time louder.

Still the same result.

"Perhaps he isn't here," thought Tonks, and to settle that point he stooped down and placed his ear against the key-hole.

The moment he did so, he heard a tremendous snoring sound, which told pretty clearly that Wild, junior, was in the room, and resting himself after his late fatigue.

Tonks's heart sunk within him.

He did not dare to disobey the orders of the thief-taker.

And he had an almost equal dread of waking Wild, junior.

However, he knocked again at the door, and, rendered desperate by his position, with so much loudness that he made all the house echo.

He awaited the result with a beating heart.

Some inarticulate grunts followed, and then he said—

"Mr. Wild—Mr. Wild."

"What now?"

George was awake.

"Mr. Wild wants you, if you please. He's downstairs in his room, and wants to see you directly."

"Eh?"

"I say, sir, that your respected father wishes to speak to you immediately."

"Go to the devil."

"You must come."

"Tell him I'll see him jolly well d—d first. Do you think I am to be woke up out of a comfortable sleep, and fetched out of bed in the middle of the night just to please his d—d foolery? Tonks!"

"What, sir."

"Tell him to go and be d—d, and that I'll see him as far in h—l as he is out of it before I'll come: there now."

And George Wild, having thus delivered himself,



[JACK SHEPPARD PROTECTS EDGORTH BESS FROM THE ATTACK OF THE MAD DOG.]

turned over on his bed, and complacently went to sleep again.

But here was a dilemma for Tonks.

What on earth was he to do?

He did not dare stop.

Yet he hesitated.

He feared to knock at the door again.

He was recalled to himself by hearing Jonathan banging on the table.

He was getting impatient at the delay.

Tonks turned round and round.

At one moment he thought he would go one way.

The next another.

At last, with his knees shaking under him as though they would never sustain his weight, he went downstairs, and knocked hurriedly at the door of Jonathan's room.

The thief-taker roared out for him to come in.

Tonks opened the door to the extent of a few inches only, and then projected the upper part of his head into the room.

Jonathan glared at him.

"Where's George?"

"If you please, Mr. Wild"——

Tonks paused.

"Well, villain? Come into the room. What the devil do you mean by poking your head in like that? Come in, villain, or"——

Tonks did not wait to hear the enunciation of the threat, but came into the room at once.

He shook in every limb.

"If you please, sir," he said, hastily, "he's asleep."

"Wake him, then."

"I did, sir. He answered me."

"What did he say?"

"I don't like to tell you, sir."

"Ya—ah. If you don't"——

And Jonathan assumed such an awfully diabolical look, that Tonks cried—

"He told me to tell you that he'd see you jolly well d—d before he'd get up in the middle of the night, and

that he'd see you stuck as far in h—l as you are out of it, and then he wouldn't."

The expression of Jonathan's face while Tonks made this communication was really a picture to see.

He pushed his wig almost off his head, and staggered back several paces.

Tonks could not help enjoying his consternation, though he did not dare to allow it to be visible.

"He said that, did he?" gasped Wild, at length.

"He did."

"Then go upstairs again, and say that, unless he comes down this moment, I will have him kicked out of the house. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"Be off, then."

Tonks once more departed upon his most unpleasant errand.

Once more he knocked at the door, but this time with firmness.

He heard a storm of imprecations from within.

The next moment the door was thrown open, and George Wild appeared upon the threshold, with nothing on but his shirt.

"Take that!" he cried; and, as he spoke, he threw something with great force and suddenness at Tonk's head.

Providentially, however, he saw the missile coming, and he ducked his head just in time to allow what was thrown to pass over him harmlessly.

There was a tremendous crash as it struck against the opposite wall.

"What the devil do you mean?" he roared.

In a voice at least an octave higher, Tonks cried—

"The guv'nor says he'll have you kicked out of the house if you don't come down and speak to him."

There were very few persons who knew Jonathan Wild so well as his son did.

He knew just how far he could go with safety.

This was no idle threat, he felt certain; and, as he did not wish to come to a rupture just at present, he hastily slipped on his garments, telling Tonks to say he would be down in a moment.

This message was delivered.

Wild, junior, however, felt far from pleased with being thus disturbed in his first sleep, and he muttered some very awful curses as he descended the stairs.

"D—n me! guv'nor," he exclaimed, as he entered the room in which his father was sitting, "this is a new move, ain't it? Cuss me, if I like it."

Jonathan frowned, but did not speak.

"What is it, guv'nor? Speak up! What have you got in your mind? If I can give you easement, I am sure I will."

"Don't be a fool, George. When I sent up to you I wanted you particularly—you might have been sure of that."

"It's d—d fine for you to talk like that. I believe you can live without sleep, but I can't, and there's an end of it. It ain't very pleasant to be woke up with some one tabbering at the door, and telling you to get up."

"George."

"What, guv'nor?"

"Are you willing to listen and pay attention to what I am going to say to you?"

"Of course I am."

"Sit down, then, and pour out a glass of brandy."

George did as he was bid, and for the first time, began to feel curious about what his father could possibly want him for.

"I'm paying every attention, guv'nor," he said, as he seated himself.

"Very well, George. Now, I have been rather pleased with the manner in which you carried out the little affair with Blueskin."

"Oh! you are."

"I am."

"Cut along, then. So am I."

"Your success encourages me to set you upon another enterprise; and, if you succeed in that,"—

"Don't promise, guv'nor. Tell me what I have got to do, and, when I have done it, I shan't be backward in asking payment, never fear."

"Well, then, I think you pretty well understand all about the girl I want to get rid of?"

"Edgworth Bess?"

"Yes, that is the name by which she is known."

"What then?"

"She is an heiress."

"Well?"

"Now there are in existence certain documents which incontrovertibly prove her identity, and also prove her rights to a large fortune. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Down below in one of the cells I have a prisoner who knows where those papers are. He has hidden them, indeed, but he refuses to tell me where. I have tried every means possible to get the information from him. I went down to-night. He is almost starving with hunger. I offered him immediate freedom if he would surrender; but he refused, and apparently with greater firmness than he ever has before!"

"Oh! and suppose he was to tell you. Should you set him free, according to promise?"

"Do I look like a fool?"

"I must say, at times you bear a strong resemblance to one."

"Pho—pho! This is trifling. The moment I obtained the information I sought I should slay him on the spot. He would be of no use to me then, and it would be decidedly unsafe to set him at liberty."

"Well, guv'nor, you don't tell me who this prisoner is, so I am compelled to ask this question. Does he know you?"

"The prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Of course he does."

"I mean, does he know your capacity for treachery, and that you are not to be trusted on your oath?"

Jonathan scowled.

"Its plain talking, I know," continued his son, "but does he know you?"

"He ought to."

"That is enough, then. He is aware that the only chance he has of his life is by keeping his secret, and so you may depend you will never know it—by his telling, at any rate."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"So do I."

"I am glad to find you of the same mind. What next, guv'nor?"

"I want to find those papers. If I discover them, the prisoner dies!"

"You are sure they are in existence?"

"Quite certain. I have seen them."

"And they are not destroyed, you think?"

"Oh! no. And now, George, where do you think it likely such papers would be hidden?"

"Can't answer that question, guv'nor."

"Where should you think?"

"Don't know enough of the particulars to say."

"I will tell you more, then. You must understand that this girl has an uncle who contrived to usurp her rights and title—no matter by what means. This uncle is my prisoner."

"The devil!"

"And he has repented."

"Ha! ha!"

"He wants to restore to the girl that which rightfully belongs to her; and that it will by no means answer my purpose to allow him to do, because, in a word, I intend to have the lot myself."

"You are a wonderful man, guv'nor. There's no sort of mistake about that."

Wild grinned.

"It is this uncle who had possession of the papers I have referred to, and who has secreted them somewhere. Now, where should you think would be a likely place?"

"How do you know he has hidden them?"

"Because he says so."

"Bah!"

"And I cannot find them."

"Where have you looked?"

"I have had his person thoroughly searched, and am convinced he does not carry them about with him."

"Had he any suspicion that you were about to make him prisoner?"

"No."

"You took him by surprise?"
 "Quite."

CHAPTER CCXC.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON MAKE CLOSE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING PAPERS.

"It is a strange thing," said Wild, junior, after a few minutes' rumination. "Had this uncle any motive for secreting these papers?"

"No motive that I can think of."

"Well, then, I can't make it out."

"No more can I. But think the matter over, George. It is very important that those papers should be in my possession."

"I don't doubt that. You say you took this uncle prisoner at a moment when you believed he least expected it."

"Just so."

"And then you immediately searched his person?"

"Immediately."

"You did not let him go out of your sight a moment after you made him prisoner, until you searched him?"

"Well, I can't exactly say that."

"Why not?"

"You see, the first thing I did was to shut him up in one of the cells downstairs, but, as soon after as possible, I went down and had him searched."

"And then the papers were nowhere to be found."

"Nowhere."

"Did you search the cell?"

"Every square inch in it; and as that, like all the rest, was constructed under my own supervision, I am able to say positively that the papers are not in the cell."

"I am afraid you will have to give them up."

"No—no. I must and will find them."

"That's always the way you talk. You have searched his house, of course?"

"Oh! yes."

"And unsuccessfully?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, gov'nor, I confess myself beaten. You may depend this uncle had a pretty good idea of what kind of man he was dealing with, and therefore, suspecting you might some day make him a prisoner, he has hidden the papers; and, depend upon it, without having the least clue, it would be folly to think of discovering them."

"But I cannot give up anything of such vast importance as this so easily, George. I do think the prisoner knows that he only has a chance of his life while he retains the secret of where the papers are hidden, but I don't think he suspected beforehand."

"Well, maybe he did not."

"Now, George, suppose you had something you wished to hide, where should you place it?"

"I don't know: in the most unlikely place I could think of."

"Most likely it would be somewhere in your own house, if you had one."

"Certainly."

"Then that may be the case with this uncle."

"There seems a probability of it; but what are you driving at, gov'nor? You told me you had searched the house."

"And so I have."

"Very well, then."

"But still, I fear, not with that care with which it ought to be searched."

"I see."

"So I want you to accompany me at once, and we will have one more good look about us."

"But it's a rum time of night, gov'nor."

"There could not be a time more suited to our purpose."

"Where is the house?"

"In Piccadilly."

"Is it occupied?"

"No; since the disappearance of the owner of it, it has been shut up."

"We shall have to break in, then?"

"That will not be much trouble."

"Not if you know the ins and outs of the place it won't, gov'nor."

"Well, I will manage all that. Just array yourself, you need do no more."

"You will see to the rest?"

"Yes."

"All right, then; I am ready."

"Wait a moment."

Jonathan Wild stowed about his person several burglarious instruments, in the use of which he was quite an expert.

He was soon ready, and having drank a parting glass of brandy, the pair set out upon their expedition.

The man on the lock looked rather surprised to see them both go out together.

As they crossed the Old Bailey they heard the different churches in the metropolis chiming the hour of one.

London was quite empty and deserted at that hour a century and a half ago, except, perhaps, in the neighbourhood of such places as Covent Garden-market.

A steady, drizzling kind of rain was falling, too, and had been falling for some hours, and this materially contributed to clear the streets of people.

As they proceeded they did not even so much as meet with a solitary watchman.

Those guardians of the night were all snugly ensconced in their boxes, and fast asleep.

The distance from Jonathan Wild's house in Newgate-street to the mansion recently occupied by Lord Donnull, in Piccadilly, was rather considerable, but Jonathan and his son walked at a brisk pace.

Jonathan Wild was anxious in the extreme to obtain possession of those papers.

Could he but once obtain them, he felt he should be quite master of the situation.

He should fear nothing, and the accomplishment of his fiendish scheme would be easy enough.

The difficulties that stood in the way, however, were rather great.

The reader should understand that he had all along confidently calculated upon extorting from the lips of Lord Donnull the secret of their hiding-place.

But we have seen how totally he failed in doing this, although the means he had employed to wrest a confession from him were, one would have thought, ample enough.

He was now thrown back upon his own resources, for he quite believed that he should never be able to extort a disclosure from his prisoner.

He was anxious to possess the papers, too.

Time was of great importance, and he made up his mind that, should he be successful in his present enterprise, Lord Donnull should not survive another day.

And as he strode along the silent and deserted streets he occupied his mind in devising schemes by which he would put the unfortunate man to death.

George Wild, on the contrary, was busy thinking about these papers.

"They must be of great importance," he muttered mentally, "or else the gov'nor would not be in such a fidget about them. All I can say is, if I once get hold of them he will have some trouble in persuading me to give them up again!"

In about half-an-hour Piccadilly was reached.

Jonathan Wild well knew which was the house occupied by Lord Donnull, and he directed his steps to it without hesitation.

It faced the park railings.

Jonathan went straight to the front door, which, according to the fashion of the times, was a large and overhanging one.

When they stood beneath it, they were completely hidden from observation.

It was not Jonathan Wild's first visit to this place.

When the house had been closed, every part of it had been securely fastened, with the exception of the front door, which was locked.

The reason of this was obvious.

It would be impossible for the bolts to be shot into their sockets from without.

Knowing this, the thief-taker inserted a skeleton-key into the lock; which, being of a very common description, yielded at once.

Like two shadows, the precious pair glided through the door, which Wild, senior, carefully closed after them, and relocked.

He did not anticipate any interruption, or having to beat a speedy retreat.

The interior of the house was intensely dark.

The first thing Jonathan did, then, was to set about procuring a light; and, as he had provided for this, he was not long about it.

Some phosphorous matches were first produced, and with these he lighted a small dark lantern, which diffused a brilliant light, in consequence of the excellence of the lens, and the brightness of the reflector behind it.

A broad beam of light came through it, and, wherever this fell, all objects were distinctly visible.

"Let us begin at the beginning, guv'nor, 'n' we are to search the house."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, let us go right up as high as we can, until we can go no higher, and then begin to look; gradually descending to the ground, and leaving no place without closely examining it."

"I should have adopted that course myself."

"So much the better, then, since we shan't fall out about that. But, if we are to search the house thoroughly, it will take us a long time."

"Never mind that, so long as our trouble is rewarded."

"That's all very well; but I mean we shall have to make several journeys here to do it."

"I don't know that. It will all depend upon circumstances."

"So it will."

"Let us hope we shall succeed."

"With all my heart. Do you know the way up to the top, guv'nor?"

"Oh! yes."

"Lead on, then."

Jonathan Wild crossed the passage to the foot of a broad flight of stairs, and up these they proceeded with all speed.

The house was a high one, and some minutes elapsed before they reached the top story.

But at length they arrived.

The policy or mode of action recommended by Wild, junior, was excellent, and well calculated to ensure success.

Indeed, if the papers were concealed in the house, and the search conducted properly, they must inevitably have been found.

There were indications that the rooms on the top-floor had been used as sleeping apartments for the servants, and they had been left in a condition of the greatest disorder.

With a patience scarcely credible the two Wilds carefully and severally examined every loose article.

Then when this was done, the walls were sounded, the cupboards searched, the boards on the floor examined, with a view to ascertain whether they presented any signs of recent disturbance, and the chimney was poked up to see whether anything had been concealed there.

Then, after all this had been done without producing any result, they searched every drawer there was in the place, and took the bedsteads to pieces.

Both worked with right good will, but still a good deal of time was consumed.

At length, however, they prepared to ascend to the next floor, with the satisfaction, if satisfaction it could be called, of being quite confident that the papers they wanted were not concealed on the top story.

Over these operations we need not linger.

Let it suffice to say that the other bedrooms in the house were searched, with the like result.

And yet they allowed no place, no matter how unlikely or how ill adapted for the purpose of concealment, to pass unexamined.

At length a spacious room on the first-floor was reached, which was magnificently fitted up as a library.

Here there seemed a better prospect of success, and although by this time the dawn of the new day had fully come, Wild and his son set about their task with unabated vigour.

Their previous failures, so far from disheartening them, only seemed to have the effect of endowing them with fresh courage.

But it may be that they entertained great hopes of being able to find what they sought in the library, and the

appearance of the room was well calculated to foster such an idea.

Papers were strewed about in great abundance, and in every direction.

The inside shutters of the mansion were closed and the curtains drawn over them, so Jonathan had no fears about exhibiting a light.

Accordingly, he ignited several of the wax candles which were stuck in the chandelier depending from the ceiling. Then, with praiseworthy patience, he sat down to his task.

Some papers lay upon the floor, but these were carefully gathered up.

One by one, then, they took every scrap of paper up, examined it, and cast it on the floor.

But the last paper was raised and dropped with no better result than the first.

Several books lay upon the table, and these they turned over leaf by leaf, in order to be sure that what they sought was not contained between any of them.

Still no use.

But Jonathan was not baffled yet.

One by one he took the books down off the shelves, and subjected them to the same process; and when, in this manner, several hundred books had been examined, he carefully looked at the shelves upon which they had stood.

Wild, junior, now began to look heartily tired of his work, but not so his father.

Opening a kind of cupboard, he saw within it a number of boxes, such as are made use of for the reception and preservation of papers.

He gathered fresh hope from this, and commenced an examination of their contents.

CHAPTER CCXCI.

JONATHAN WILD BELIEVES THAT HE HAS AT LAST HIT UPON THE PLACE WHERE THE PAPERS ARE CONCEALED.

If anything, however, this proved to be a longer job than any of the preceding ones, and it terminated with no better result.

Papers were there in plenty, but not the documents they required.

When the last one fluttered from his grasp, Wild, junior, looked up at his parent with an expression on his face that would be very hard to describe.

Some idea may, perhaps, be formed of it when we set down the words to which he at the same time gave utterance.

"Guv'nor," he said, "we're a couple of d—d fools."

Jonathan looked up surprised.

For his son to say such a thing of himself seemed strange.

By way of emphasis, however, George repeated the expression.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"Explain yourself."

"Why, we have been looking all this time in the wrong place."

"In the wrong place?"

"Yes."

"But you advised coming here."

"I know I did."

"Well?"

"And that's why I am a d—d fool."

"I cannot understand you."

"Well, then, I will explain. It's no good our looking in this house for the papers we require."

"Why not?"

"Because they are not here."

"How do you know that?"

"Is it at all a likely place? Guv'nor, I'll tell you what we've done."

"What?"

"Why, in seeking the profound we have overlooked the superficial."

"You are talking Greek to me."

"Then I'll speak plain English. Do you understand this? Had Lord Donmull—for such I find by these papers is his name—had he a lawyer—solicitor, you know."

"Of course he had."

"Do you know his name?"

"I can't call it to mind."

"Should you know it if you were to hear it?"

"Yes."

"Was it William Madford?"

"Yes; and his office is in Pump-court, Temple."

"Just so."

"But how did you know his name?"

"I turned over a letter of his just now."

"What about?"

"A mortgage: nothing concerning our business. And he is or was this Lord Donnull's solicitor?"

"Yes."

"Then, you may depend, he keeps all the family papers."

"I dare say he does."

"Then those we want are amongst them."

Jonathan shook his head.

"You don't think so, guv'nor?"

"I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because the papers are of such a character that he would never trust them to a lawyer."

"I don't know that."

"I do."

"But, look here. Now, suppose he had some doubts and suspicions of you—and it's d—d odd if he didn't!"

"What then?"

"He might have made these papers up into a packet and carefully sealed it, then delivered it into the hands of the solicitor, with particular instructions."

"He might have done such a thing," said the thief-taker, thoughtfully.

"Of course he might. And suppose the instructions given were something to the effect that, if he did not turn up after a certain time, the solicitor was to open the packet, and act according to the instructions contained in it."

Jonathan leapt to his feet as though galvanized.

"By heaven, George!" he cried, "I believe you have hit it!"

"Easy does it, guv'nor—easy does it."

"Easy be d—d."

"Listen to me."

"You need not speak. I can see all now plain enough. You may depend that is what he has done. By no other means can I account for his braving and defying me in the manner he has done. Yes, that is it."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"It is—it is; and, perhaps, by this the time has expired—perhaps it expires to-day—and the lawyer will open the parcel. If so, then all is over—all—"

"Easy does it, guv'nor," said Wild, junior, again.

"Why don't you take it easy?"

"Who could be easy? You would not, with all your affected philosophy, if you knew what was at stake."

"Well, guv'nor, look here a minute."

"What is it?"

"Supposing it should turn out that what I say is right? What does it matter? We can find the lawyer, and, if he's got the papers, we'll d—d soon have them."

"That must be it. We will do so. It was a lucky thought of yours, and quite took me by surprise. It never occurred to me. It accounts for everything."

"Does it? Then I am very glad to hear it."

"We will be off at once, George, to this lawyer's chambers in the Temple—at once. Come."

"Stop a minute, guv'nor."

"No—no!"

"But I say, yes—yes! Just listen to what I have got to say for a moment, will you? It's worth hearing."

"Speak, then."

"Do you think it will be wise to allow ourselves to be seen coming out of this house, and by this time there are sure to be people abroad."

"Oh! yes. I forgot the shutters are closed, and the curtains drawn, which fills this room with darkness, but out in the street it is quite light."

"Just so."

"I have been so intently occupied upon what I am about, that I forgot to note the flight of time."

"It's half-past nine now, guv'nor, as near as may be."

"You are quite right, it would be injudicious in the extreme for us to be seen leaving this house during daylight. And yet to wait here—"

"You don't like the idea of that, do you?"

"I don't; but it would be no good to go to the lawyer's chambers before night, would it?"

"No good at all, guv'nor; so we may as well pass the time here as anywhere else."

"There are beds to sleep in, and I am weary."

"Ditto, guv'nor. Recollect, I was woke out of my first sleep."

"D—n your first sleep."

"Very well. Look here, guv'nor. You are so uncertain in your movements, and I have suffered so much lately from being hungry and having nothing to eat, that I never come out now unprovided."

As he spoke, Wild, junior, produced from one of the side pockets in his coat a parcel, which, on being opened, disclosed a package of comestibles.

These he began to eat with great relish, and asked his father to share the meal with him.

He did so, and produced a huge flask of brandy, for that was a thing Wild, senior, never travelled without.

This being the case, the two got on very well, and it did not take them many minutes to demolish all that was before them.

When they had finished, Wild, junior, was for lying down and having a nap, but Jonathan would not listen to it.

The meal he had made had invigorated him, and he was now ready to go through a fresh lot of fatigue.

"I don't think we ought to take your supposition for granted, George."

"What's up now, guv'nor?"

"Why, as we are here, and must stay here some time longer, I don't think we can do better than finish searching the house, and then we shall know whether the papers are here or not."

"That would be a satisfaction."

"It would. Come, George, we shall never have a better opportunity than the present."

"Go on, old 'un; I am ready."

This being decided upon, both rose from the seats upon which they had been sitting, and recommenced their search.

In this manner several hours were passed away, but without their finding the least trace of what they sought.

Still, as the thief-taker said, it would be a satisfaction to know they were not there.

It must not be thought, however, that on this account the search instituted was any the less vigorous or exact.

Every spot was searched with the same care and minuteness as before.

The papers were not discovered, and at length, thoroughly wearied and tired out, they ascended to the bed-rooms, and flung themselves down on two beds, dressed just as they were.

In a few moments, so thoroughly were they fatigued, that they fell off to sleep, as the melodious concert from their noses would have testified to any one within a reasonable distance.

The reader doubtless will be of opinion that the suggestion put forth by George Wild carried upon the face of it a great deal of plausibility and probability.

As Wild said, should such prove to be the actual fate, it would at once account for the obstinate behaviour of Lord Donnull.

He could well afford to defy him and tell him to do his worst.

Jonathan's sleep was disturbed by various images connected with the operations in which he had recently been engaged.

How long they slept they knew not.

The thief-taker was the first to wake.

He immediately called his son, who was snoring away at a furious rate.

However, he got up.

Upon consulting their watches, they found they had lain much later than they had intended.

It was, in fact, a few minutes past eight in the evening.

"Curse that!" said Jonathan.

"Never mind, guv'nor; it can't be helped now. What's the first move?"

"I must go back home, first."

"What for?"

"I have been absent a great many hours, and I could not rest any longer without knowing whether all was safe or not."

"Very well; it won't take long to ascertain that, and we shall be in plenty of time even then."

"Of course we shall, and I shall be able to provide myself with tools and such like."

"Then we will say agreed to that, eh, guv'nor?"

"Come on, then."

"I am coming."

Without further delay, the pair descended the stairs to the front door, and Jonathan, having extinguished his lantern and put it out of sight, prepared to open the door.

Two minutes afterwards they found themselves in the street.

It was quite dark.

A hackney-coach came lumbering by, and Jonathan hailed it and got in.

It was hardly worth while to fatigue themselves unnecessarily.

They had doubtless got a pretty good night's work before them.

Upon arriving at their destination, Jonathan got out, and gave a hasty summons at the door.

It was opened instantly, for the man on the lock, aware of his long absence, was on the look-out for him.

"Is all well?" asked Wild.

"Yes, sir."

Jonathan growled, and passed on.

In the passage he met Quilt Arnold, who had heard his arrival, and who was hastening towards him.

The thief-taker renewed his question, and received the same satisfactory reply.

Doubtful of the reality or correctness of such good news, however, he hastened upstairs to the room in which he had left Blueskin, and about whom he felt the greatest anxiety.

He was about to enter when Mr. Snoxall came forth.

He held his finger on his lip.

"Speak in a whisper, Mr. Wild," he said.

"Is he worse?"

"Yes."

"How is that?"

"Well, I can hardly tell you. I would hardly give a pin for his life now."

"But you told me he was going on all right."

"So he was."

"What has caused this relapse?"

"He has been getting up, and trying to make his escape I expect."

"Is he safe?"

"Look for yourself."

Mr. Snoxall gently pushed open the door of the room, and allowed Jonathan Wild to take a peep at the interior.

There lay Blueskin, extended at full length upon the bed, and looking by far more like a corpse than a human being.

But Jonathan was satisfied.

His prisoner was safe.

Still, when he descended he renewed his caution to Quilt Arnold respecting the guard, and strictly bade him keep good watch.

Then, going upstairs to his room on the first-floor, he provided himself with such articles as he thought he should require.

These preparations occupied an hour, but he had still some time to spare, so he sat down to deliberate and make up his mind as to just what he would do.

While thus engaged, his son George, who had fully equipped himself, came into the room.

"Are you ready, guv'nor?" he asked. "Oh! you're taking it easy at last, I see."

CHAPTER CCXCII.

JACK SHEPPARD ESTABLISHES ANOTHER CLAIM UPON THE GRATITUDE OF THE PERSECUTED HEIRESS, EDGORTH BESS.

It is, we confess, with quite a feeling of pleasure that we turn from narrating the proceedings of Jonathan Wild and his son, to occupy ourselves with the fortunes of Jack Sheppard and Edgorth Bess.

The reader will recollect that when we left them last they were standing hand in hand upon the threshold of that ruined, haunted farm-house in which they had had so strange and terrible an adventure.

They were watching, but, alas! vainly, for Blueskin to make his appearance.

At that very moment he was in the power of Jonathan Wild, although they knew it not.

Sadly they cast their glances all around the horizon, in the faint hope of seeing the advancing form of their absent comrade, but, alas! they were doomed to disappointment.

And though his own heart was chilled and heavy, not merely in consequence of the absence of his friend, but from the impression which the supernatural visitation made upon his mind, Jack Sheppard, with a choking voice, endeavoured to utter words of consolation to his more feeble companion, whose eyes he could see filled with tears every moment, and who, with the greatest difficulty, controlled her emotion.

The effort was almost greater than he could accomplish.

The horrors of their situation pressed with full force upon him, and almost drove him to distraction.

That Blueskin had been either captured or slain, he felt confident, for nothing else would account for his long absence.

Weak, starving, penniless almost, what were they to do?

No word of complaint came from the lips of his poor suffering companion, although he knew full well she must be suffering much agony.

Very many hours had elapsed now since either she or he had partaken of a morsel of food, and the cravings of their stomachs, which at first seemed unendurable, degenerated into a deadly sensation of sickness and nausea.

They felt, too, giddy and faint.

To them the bright rays of the morning sun, and the smiling, peaceful-looking landscape, appeared nothing but a mockery.

The contrast made the misery of their situation more glaringly apparent.

Sadly, then, their eyes roamed all around, and they rested upon nothing that gave them the least hope.

"Do not despair, dearest," said Jack Sheppard to his companion, and pressing her hand as he spoke. "Do not despair. Although the prospect before us is so very dark and gloomy, we must strive to go on cheerfully, and await with patience the dawn of better times."

"I have not the strength of mind, Jack, that you have," replied Edgorth Bess, her tears threatening every moment to obtain the mastery over her. "Difficulties and dangers do not have such a depressing influence upon you as they do upon me, but I cannot help it; and now, although it will pain you to hear it, I am becoming thoroughly heart-weary, and beginning to lose all hope."

"Do not speak so sadly, dearest," said Jack, "or you will break my heart."

"Forgive me, I am weak."

And, as she spoke, the poor suffering girl broke into a flood of tears, that made Jack's breast swell and ache until it was almost more than he could endure.

He felt that it would be a relief to his own overburdened heart if he could mingle his tears with hers, but a kind of pride would not permit him to do this.

But he felt himself incapable of doing anything to assuage the poor girl's grief.

He merely stole his arm around her waist, and drew her head down upon his shoulder.

Here she wept in plenty.

During this time, Jack occupied his thoughts with a careful consideration of their position, so that he might be able to say what should be done.

This he found was no very easy matter.

Between them they only possessed a very small sum of money, which would just keep them from perishment but for a short time only.

Despite the great confidence he felt in Blueskin's resources and ability to free himself from any position of danger, he could not help feeling full of apprehension as to his fate.

Should he be dead?

There were things far more unlikely, but this was a contingency of so dreadful a character that he did not dare to speculate upon it.

It was possible that the ruined farm-house would form an excellent place of refuge for them, and doubtless it would be to that spot that Blueskin would repair as soon as he was able.

But, after what had taken place within that lonesome and dismal habitation, Jack felt that it could no longer be a place of refuge for them.

The bare ground would be better than that roof under which so many dire atrocities had been perpetrated.

Those were his own feelings in the matter, and he was quite sure that his companion would share them in even a greater degree than himself.

In which direction to look for Blueskin he knew not.

There was no clue, no trace as to the route he had taken; and Jack was well aware that to institute any inquiries respecting him would be dangerous in the extreme.

Then, again, in the event of Blueskin having been made prisoner, and succeeded in freeing himself again, the first place to which he would naturally come to look for Bess and Jack would be the ruined farm-house in which he had left them.

This seemed to indicate a necessity of hovering round about that spot, and on no account going far from it.

Otherwise they would miss each other.

Then, on the other hand, there was the dread that, if Jonathan Wild had captured Blueskin anywhere in the vicinity, he would extend his researches, under the belief that where one was the others would be also.

On the one hand, then, if he remained he should be menaced by the danger of discovery by Wild.

If he left and wandered away, he would run the risk of losing Blueskin.

Truly was he between the horns of a dilemma, and he had only a choice of evils.

By the time he had reached this point in his reflections, Edgworth Bess had ceased weeping, and now she looked up into his countenance with an air of greater resignation.

Never in his life, perhaps, was Jack so sensible of the great responsibility which had been cast upon him by having this young girl so fully under his protection, than he did at the present moment.

"I am better now, Jack," she said. "Don't be angry with me for crying so. I could not help it. What shall we do now?"

"That is what I have been trying to decide."

"And I am so dreadfully faint for want of food, Jack. Where shall we get any? I believe I shall die if I do not have some soon."

"It breaks my heart," said Jack, "when I think to what privations and sufferings you have been subjected through the villainy of that man whose existence is a foul spot on the fair surface of creation."

"I cannot think how it is that such monstrous villainy as his can remain so long unpunished."

"And I. And yet I have a feeling within which tells me that the day of his utter downfall and confusion is not far distant."

"But, Jack. Let us, at all events, leave this place. Surely in this part of the country we shall not be likely to be recognised."

"Yes, come with me, for I cannot see you die of hunger before my eyes. Thank heaven! I have the means of obtaining provisions for to-day, though I fear we shall have some trouble. But never mind that. Come!"

"And Blueskin," said Edgworth Bess, as she lingered a moment. "How shall we find him if we go away from here—or, rather, how will he find us?"

"We must not think of that just at present. It will be better if we can buoy ourselves up with the hope that while we are on our way to the next village we may meet with him."

"I trust we may, but I fear there is little ground for entertaining such a hope. Oh! Jack, tell me truly what you think has become of him."

"I am almost afraid to think."

"I dread the worst."

* And, to speak frankly, so do I. You remember I heard the sound of horses' hoofs upon the road while we halted near the suicide's grave."

"Oh! yes," replied Edgworth Bess, shuddering at this allusion to the ill-omened place. "Oh! yes. I recollect you said that Jonathan Wild was on the road."

"Such was my suspicion, and I fear it is out too true a one. It may be that Wild pounced upon Blueskin by surprise, and made him a prisoner before he was aware of it."

"Perhaps he has put him to death."

"I do not fear that. I know he reserves Blueskin for a particular fate."

"What is that?"

"A favourite mode of disposing of people Wild has. It is of having them executed at Tyburn."

Bess shuddered.

"At times," she said, "I can scarcely bring myself to believe that he is a man."

"It would be fortunate for the credit of humanity if it could be proved that he was not. But come, we will not linger here. Take hold of my arm. Lean upon me. It is true I am weak, but still I am stronger than you are."

Edgworth Bess was glad enough to accept of this assistance, for she felt that she was scarcely able to walk without a support of some kind.

In this way, then, they made their way through the neglected fields which surrounded the farm-house, and in a short time reached the gate that led into the high-road.

Through this they passed, and, quite unconsciously, followed in the exact footsteps of Blueskin, for that was the very route he had taken a few hours before.

"We will stop at the first inn we come to," said Jack, "and there obtain some refreshment. Ah! look. Tell me whether my eyes deceive me. Is not that a sign which I can see in the distance, swinging lazily to and fro in the wind?"

"It is, Jack."

"Oh! joy—joy. You have not far to go now. I hope we shall have the good fortune to meet with some kind persons."

"So do I. But, Jack!"

"What, dearest?"

"Will it not seem strange for us to be seen wandering thus together?"

"It may have a strange look."

"It may be the means of generating suspicion."

"It may."

"How can it be avoided?"

"I know but of one means."

"What?"

"For us to pass ourselves off for brother and sister, and invariably address each other by that title. Thus I shall be brother John, and you will be sister Elizabeth."

"Very well, Jack; let it be so. How I wish that I had a brother!"

The forlornness of the poor girl's situation, bereft as she was of all relations, struck deeply home to Jack's heart.

"I will be your brother," he replied, in as cheerful a voice as he could assume; for Jack was afraid to allow her thoughts to dwell upon that subject. "I will be a brother, and perform a brother's duty."

She pressed his hand affectionately as he spoke, but remained silent.

A walk of a few minutes brought them to the inn.

It was a rude, old-fashioned building, built on the outskirts of the village.

Looking up at the sign, Jack saw that it was called "The Well of Content."

He pointed it out to his companion, and expressed a hope that it would prove to be such to them.

There was a comfortable, homely look about the place, and Jack felt quite pleased with it.

He could not help envying those whose lot it was to live there so peacefully.

There was an air of repose all around, from the cat that was basking on the wall to a couple of horses which were drinking from the trough in front of the door.

With an easy, confident step, Jack led his companion to the front door of the inn.

He ascended the two well-worn steps before it, and walked a few steps down a passage into a large kitchen, in which a fire was blazing, and casting a comfortable warmth around.

A woman came forward, and, Jack conjectured, was the landlady.

He was favourably impressed with her appearance in a moment.

He could tell by her beaming face that she possessed a kind heart.

"We are travelling to London," said Jack to her, "and this is my sister. We are hungry, and want rest and

refreshment. We are not rich enough to ride, but still we can pay for our accommodation."

The landlady was favourably prepossessed by the appearance of Edgworth Bess, and she at once invited them into the kitchen.

They sat down upon a screen by the fireside, and a tempting meal to the hungry wayfarers was laid upon the table before them.

To this they did ample justice.

Afterwards Jack, having given her a caution not to say too much, confided Edgworth Bess to the care of the landlady, in order that she might make some alterations in her toilette.

CHAPTER CCXCIII.

JACK SHEPPARD SHOOTS THE MAD DOG IN THE LANE,
AND SAVES THE LIFE OF EDGWORTH BESS.

It was about two hours after this that Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess bade farewell to the friendly landlady and left the inn.

Both felt much better, both bodily and mentally, and as they walked along the high-road they discoursed with lighter hearts upon the dangers and difficulties of their situation.

But the prospect before them was dismal enough to depress the spirits of any one.

The day, however, was very fine—unusually so for England; and the sun's warm rays seemed to have a beneficial effect upon their minds.

Jack and Edgworth Bess passed through the village, but not without attracting a great deal of attention; for it was a remote, out-of-the-way place, where to see a stranger was quite an event.

It may be imagined, then, that our friends were glad enough when the hamlet and all its prying inhabitants were left behind, and they once more got out into the open country.

They walked along briskly, for each felt as though they had received a fresh lease of life.

Jack, finding no traces of Blueskin, endeavoured to persuade his companion that the best thing they could do would be to proceed direct to London.

But Edgworth Bess seemed to shrink with horror at the bare idea of returning to the metropolis, which had ever been a place of so much danger to her.

"Let us stay here a little longer," she said. "It is not worth while to be too precipitate. If Blueskin is a prisoner we cannot aid him, and you said just now you had no doubt about his ability to effect his escape."

"I did, but"—

"And we have no proof that he is a prisoner. It may be that he strayed so far in the darkness as to miss his road, and he may at this moment be at the farm-house."

Jack shook his head at this supposition.

"We ought not to stray too far from it," he said, "for fear some trivial circumstance may have occurred to prevent Blueskin from returning. If such prove to be the case, the first place to which he would make his way would be the farm-house."

"Of course it would. No, Jack, we will not go to London—at all events, not yet. Let us give Blueskin a chance of rejoining us."

"As you will, dearest. I will never do anything which is contrary to your inclinations; and I fancy that, after all, I shall be doing best by consenting to your opinion."

"I cannot banish the thought that we shall ere long meet with him."

"I hope we shall, for suspense and anxiety are two things I am ill-calculated to bear. I would give much for some definite information."

"It would be satisfactory."

At this moment they heard a crashing noise, and under the influence of surprise they came to a sudden stop.

It was as though some one had forced a way through a dense mass of vegetation.

The sound was exactly like the rustling of boughs, and they sprang back to the place from which they had been removed.

And this was really it, for before either had time to make any remark whatever, one of the largest dogs they had ever seen dashed through the hedgerow that skirted the right-hand side of the road.

Our friends did not move, nor did they particularly

notice the dog.

Their principal attention was fixed upon the gap in the hedge through which he had burst, and through which they expected the owner of the dog to make his appearance.

But no one came, nor was there the least sound to indicate the approach of any one.

Struck with surprise at this—for Jack was sufficiently well acquainted with the habits of the dog to know that he is rarely seen alone—he turned his attention to the huge animal.

It was certainly the largest he had seen.

It was crouching down by the side of the road close to the gap in the hedge through which he had come.

His tongue was lolled from his mouth, and his lips were covered with white, flakey foam.

His eyes were expressive of the greatest ferocity, and there was something intimidating about his whole appearance.

Edgworth Bess was much alarmed, and clung tightly to Jack's arm for protection.

The dog fixed his eyes upon them, and it was pretty certain that they would not be able to make the least movement without attracting his observation.

Still Jack saw nothing to produce alarm in the look of the dog.

He seemed much exhausted, as though he had run a long way and got heated.

His fiercely gleaming eyes, however, produced a rather uncomfortable sensation.

But he by no means shared in the alarm of his companion.

"Do not be afraid," he said. "The dog will not harm us if we do not interfere with it. Lean upon me. I will walk past him on the opposite side of the road. He will not harm us then."

"Oh! Jack, see how fierce he looks—how like a wild animal he seems."

"He does indeed; but I should be a match for him, never fear, if he attempts to interfere with us."

And as he spoke, Jack took from his pocket a loaded pistol, which he calmly placed upon half-cock.

He knew that the priming was in proper order, because only a short time had elapsed since he placed fresh powder in the pan.

However, he loosened it, for fear it should have caked in any way, and then held the weapon in such a position as to be ready for immediate service.

The dog had fixed his eyes upon Jack in the peculiar manner for which the animal is remarkable.

He did not lose sight of one of Jack's motions.

Whether it was that he felt they were of a threatening nature to himself, or whether there was something in Jack's face which his instinct told him boded no good to him, would be hard to say; but, certain it is, that he gave utterance to a low growl, in which, however, there was much fierceness.

Of this, however, Jack took no sort of notice.

Passing his arm round the waist of his companion in such a manner as to support her steps and lead her on, he advanced a few steps.

But though he got as far on the side of the road opposite to that upon which the dog was as he could, the fierce-looking brute growled still more loudly, and seemed determined not to allow them to pass.

And now Jack saw, as he looked towards him, that his eyes were bloodshot, and gleamed with an unnatural kind of lustre.

His jaws, too, seemed as though they were fixed open.

Still, although he saw these signs, Jack had no idea of what they meant.

Had he done so, he would have adopted a far different course of action to what he did.

He would shrink not only from encountering such a frightful danger himself, but also from exposing Edgworth Bess to it.

The dog was mad; suffering, indeed, under that strange disease known by the misnomer of hydrophobia.

Jack spoke to the dog in a manner which he calculated would soothe it, but the brute only evinced fresh signs of fierceness.

Still Jack advanced.

It would not do for their progress to be stayed by a dog.



[JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON IN THE LAWYER'S CHAMBERS.]

Edgworth Bess felt a fresh accession of terror. Jack, however, fixed his eyes constantly upon the brute. Hitherto the dog had been lying down, but now he rose to his feet.

His size was immense.

His breed seemed to be some kind of mastiff.

Suddenly, and just when Jack and his companion arrived opposite to where he stood, he uttered one fierce, sharp howl, and darted forward.

Of the hostility of his intentions there could be no kind of doubt.

Passing by Jack, who probably he rather shrank from encountering, he sprang upon Edgworth Bess.

The poor girl threw up her arms, and to that circumstance she probably owed her life.

The dog fixed his teeth in her thick dress.

More than this he had not time to do, for, though Jack was taken aback by the suddenness with which the attack was made, he quickly recovered himself.

He cocked the pistol, and, taking a careful aim, pulled the trigger.

To have missed would almost have been an impossibility. There was a loud report, and, ere its echoes had died away, the dog lay at full-length on the ground.

The bullet had passed through his brain, thus causing instant death.

The alarm of Edgworth Bess was naturally very great, and it was with great difficulty that she kept herself from fainting.

It was only a consideration of Jack's danger that enabled her to do so.

But, as soon as he saw there was nothing more to be apprehended from the mad dog, Jack restored the discharged pistol to his pocket, and turned all his attention to soothing the apprehensions of his companion.

In this he succeeded in a few moments, and Edgworth Bess cast a shuddering glance at the lifeless form of her antagonist.

"You have another claim upon my gratitude," she said, as she looked up into Jack's face with an expression that sent a thrill of pleasure through his whole body.

"Do not mention it," he said. "Lean upon me, and walk on. I am thankful things have been no worse. I had no idea the dog was mad."

"Nor I. Do you think he was?"

"I am quite sure of it. He had every symptom of raging madness."

Bess shuddered when she thus realized the full extent of the danger to which they had been exposed.

"You are unhurt, Jack, are you not?" she asked, with the greatest anxiety perceptible in her tones.

"Oh! yes; I am not hurt in the least. He did not attempt to attack me. Are you sure that you have received no injury from his fangs?"

"Quite. He has torn my dress, but done no further mischief."

"Let us be thankful for this narrow escape," he said. "We have need to be, for the danger was a terrible one."

"I tremble when I think of it."

"But, happily, it is over now, and we have no further cause for apprehension. And now, Bess, what are we to do?"

"I would rather leave that to your judgment."

"Nay—nay. I do not wish to rely upon myself, but to obtain your opinion and advice. Alas! what can have become of Blueskin?"

"What, indeed?"

"I sadly fear that he has fallen into the hands of our arch foe; and, perhaps, at this moment he is perishing for the want of such assistance as we should be able to give him."

"Do not surmise anything so horrible. Let us cling to hope until we are able to cling to it no longer. Perhaps he returned to the ruined farm-house immediately after our departure from it, and is now either waiting for our return, or else is searching for us."

"I am afraid that is but a frail hope."

"Still it is a hope."

"It is. Shall we return, then, to this farm-house, and see whether we can discover any traces of him?"

"I think so."

"Well, agreed. I should not have proposed such a thing myself, because I consider the place associated with too much terror."

"Our adventures there were terrible," said Edgworth Bess, "and I should be very loath to spend another night in such a place."

"And I too. I would not go for worlds."

"But it is daylight now, Jack. Suppose we were to linger about the vicinity of the farm-house till nightfall, and then, if Blueskin does not return by that time, we will make up our minds as to what we will do next."

"Agreed. I am pleased to find you able to talk over our position with so much calmness. It would be better, too, I think, if we were to travel by night, since we should then be more likely to avoid suspicion."

Having come to this conclusion, they turned round and retraced their steps.

But Jack did not wish to pass through the village again, so he made a considerable detour on purpose to avoid it.

He gained the high road again, and continued to pursue it until the gate was reached.

It did not seem to have been opened since they had last passed through it.

An air of silent desolation seemed to hang over the whole.

It was enough to strike a chill to any heart, and upon the poor fugitives it had a more than ordinarily depressing influence.

With a slow step they made their way up the weed-grown path which led to the main building.

On arriving, they could see no traces of a recent visit.

Pushing open the door, they entered the kitchen.

It was empty.

The wind moaned through the crevices in the walls with a mournful sound.

Otherwise, all was still.

There was something so depressing to the spirits about the appearance of this deserted kitchen that Jack could not prevail upon his companion to enter it or even to linger upon the threshold.

The last faint hope which had found a resting-place about her heart was now destroyed.

Blueskin was not there, nor could she bring herself to believe that he had been there during their absence.

She felt the disappointment keenly, for she had all along fancied he would return.

As for Jack, he could scarcely be said to feel disappointed, for he had not anticipated finding his companion there.

But when he saw that he really was not there, all those dark forebodings which had hitherto found a home in his heart returned with redoubled force.

That, by some means or other, he had fallen into the clutches of Jonathan Wild, he felt confident.

If so, he would then be in London.

Jack feared to communicate to his companion the full extent of his fears, but as the young girl looked up into his countenance she was able to tell with tolerable certainty what was passing there.

She resigned herself to the worst, and burst into a flood of despairing tears.

CHAPTER CCXCIV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGORTH BESS RESOLVE TO SET OUT FOR LONDON IN SEARCH OF BLUESKIN.

THOSE tears fell like drops of molten lead upon Jack Sheppard's heart.

He saw how sad and dejected his companion was, and he was saddened by the knowledge that there was nothing that he could do that would alleviate her distress.

And so he made no effort to check her tears.

After a little time, however, Edgworth Bess recovered herself, and she looked up into Jack's face with a smile.

But it was such a sad one that it almost broke his heart to see it.

Every time he looked at her, too, his bosom swelled with grief, for he could not avoid noticing what havoc her perils and privations were making of her health.

She was now little more than the shadow of what she was when Jack saw her first.

But no word of complaint came from the heroic girl's lips—she endured all her agony in silence.

Jack was not the less aware of it, though.

But he was powerless to effect any change.

He viewed with alarm the deathly pallor of her cheeks—her sunken and lack-lustre eye—her pale, thin lips, and her emaciated form.

By the desire of Edgworth Bess, they remained in the vicinity of the haunted farm-house until nightfall.

She could not yet bring herself to abandon all hope.

They did not enter the ill-omened building, but for the greater part of the day sat down upon a log of wood, which commanded a view of the front door.

Here they watched and waited during the long hours of the day, but not a single footstep came to disturb them in their solitude.

The place was shunned by all the inhabitants of the district.

All knew something of the terrible tragic circumstances connected with it, and they would not have ventured near for any consideration.

The fugitives were, then, safer here than they possibly could be elsewhere.

But, great as their security might be, they could not bring themselves to remain there while the situation of their comrade was involved in so much doubt.

Both Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess placed great reliance upon his resources and advice.

At length night came.

It set in cloudy, and when the sun sank, a chill wind swept over the earth and moaned among the tree-tops.

It came afterwards in short and sudden gusts.

A kind of preternatural darkness seemed to obscure the heavens, threatening a night of storm.

Jack Sheppard looked upon these symptoms of bad weather with the greatest uneasiness.

His companion was not in a fit state to be exposed to its inclemencies.

She importuned him as soon as it was dark to leave the haunted house; nor was he unwilling to do this, for the prospect of spending another night near it was far from agreeable to his feelings.

They had resolved to go back to London.

It was, so to speak, running into the jaws of the lion, but both felt they could no longer endure the suspense and anxiety they felt with regard to Blueskin's fate.

At whatever risk, they determined to know the worst. They rendered their own chance of capture ten times greater, but neither of them cared individually for that.

Having come to the determination to set out at nightfall on their road to London to ascertain their comrade's fate, they were both calmer, and when the time came they rose and set out upon their journey.

There was one circumstance which Jack did not mention to Edgworth Bess, but which gave him the greatest possible amount of uneasiness.

The money he had paid to the landlady of the "Well of Content" for their accommodation and refreshment had exhausted his purse.

He had but a few coppers left.

Edgworth Bess, as he knew, had no money whatever.

They were a long, long way from London.

Penniless, hungry, and tired, how were they to reach it? This was the circumstance which gave Jack so much uneasiness.

Edgworth Bess, he was confident, was quite unequal to the task of walking to London.

Even if she set out, she would break down before she had proceeded far.

Then, there was the length of time which this tedious mode of progression would necessarily consume.

Time was an object, and a very important one too.

He wanted to reach London at the earliest moment, otherwise he would arrive too late to attempt even to intercept Jonathan Wild's plans.

What was to be done?

Money must be procured somehow and from somewhere, otherwise they would perish.

Silently and moodily, then, Jack Sheppard walked on by the side of his companion, who in vain endeavoured to draw from him the reason of his abstraction.

After gaining the high road, they proceeded for some distance towards London.

The road was deserted, or nearly so.

Suddenly, however, there came upon their ears a heavy, rumbling sound.

Almost at the same moment that they were conscious of it, they perceived before them at some distance two faint, starlike lights.

Jack knew in a moment that some vehicle was approaching, probably a stage-coach.

He informed his companion as much.

The huge vehicle came rolling along at the rate of full twelve miles an hour.

As it came nearer, Jack Sheppard drew aside, and got as close to the hedge as possible.

He was anxious for the safety of his companion.

As the vehicle came nearer, Jack Sheppard's supposition was found to be a correct one.

It was a stage-coach that was approaching.

But it was coming from London, not going towards it.

There was a flash of light, a rattle, and a rush, and then the ponderous affair swept past them.

Jack made no remark concerning it, but his thoughts were busy.

They ought to be in the stage-coach.

Edgworth Bess would then be able to reach London in comfort.

But, alas! they they had not the means.

There was only one mode by which Jack saw he could obtain them.

And that was by waylaying and robbing the next traveller they met.

But Edgworth Bess, he knew, would never consent to the adoption of such a course as that.

Still, Jack did not despair of putting it into execution.

He considered his position was desperate, and that desperate means were requisite to overcome it.

At present, however, he could not conceive how he was to put his design into execution without the knowledge of his companion.

But he trusted that the chapter of events would favour him.

It may now be said that Jack had fully made up his mind to stop the next passenger he met and take from him what money might be required to pay their passage by the stage-coach.

He was quite right in thinking that Edgworth Bess would oppose herself to such a course of action, and therefore he forbore to say a word to her about it.

He endeavoured to distract her attention by talking upon other subjects.

It seemed, though, that he was not to have an opportunity of putting his design into execution.

They did not meet with a single person, either mounted or on foot.

Jack determined to stop no one but the latter.

The former would be too hazardous.

And now, as they continued on their way without meeting with a single living creature, the courage and strength of Edgworth Bess appeared to ebb away, and she hung heavily on Jack's arm.

It was clear that she would not be able to proceed on foot much further.

The poor girl was wearied to death, for though she had had rest, it was not of the proper kind to recover her from fatigue.

Oh! how anxiously did Jack look out for some traveller to make his appearance.

He was afraid, too, that he should hear the stage-coach pass before he was prepared to hail it, and if so he felt that his vexation would exceed all bounds.

A long time would have to elapse before the second coach made its appearance.

Perhaps twelve hours.

The reader may then be able to picture to himself the anxiety which Jack suffered.

At length, however, to his inexpressible joy, he saw in the distance a light of some kind, though at first he was unable to make out what it was.

It was some distance in advance.

Two things connected with it, however, soon became evident.

One was that the light was in motion.

The other was that it was approaching them.

Edgworth Bess saw it, and pointed it out to Jack.

But he had seen it already, though he did not think fit to tell her so.

With a curiosity equal in both, they looked towards this light, and endeavoured to make out what it was.

But this they were unable to do.

From the height the light was from the ground, and from the manner in which it was waved about, they conjectured that it must be carried by some one who was walking.

But, if so, the individual must have been walking in a very extraordinary manner, for the light cut many fantastic capers.

At one moment it would appear to be stationary; then it would advance; then retrograde; while its height from the ground varied to an extraordinary degree.

Jack's curiosity was strongly excited, so much so, that he almost forgot his original intention.

A very short time elapsed, however, before the mystery was cleared up, though what Jack saw elicited no small amount of surprise.

There were two persons approaching.

The first carried in his hand a lighted torch, which flickered about in the wind, and threatened every moment to go out.

This man was dressed in the livery of a servant.

His behaviour and manner exhibited the utmost degree of servility and obsequiousness.

He bowed at almost every step he took, and walked backwards the whole of the way.

This accounted for the extraordinary motions of the light.

The person who followed him appeared by his dress and the behaviour of the servant to be of very great distinction indeed.

It was evident he thought so, too, for he walked along in what he doubtless thought was a very dignified and imposing sort of way.

In his own mind he was clearly a man of great importance.

His countenance bore an expression of deep vexation, as though something had occurred which had displeased him mightily.

He was addressing the obsequious servant, and, as he drew nearer, Jack heard him say—

"Curse it! How much further have I to go? I

thought you told me when the carriage broke down that we were only a quarter of a mile from an inn, and here we have come half-a-mile now, if we have come a yard. I can't see any signs of the inn. Curse you, James, where is it?"

"A little further on, worthy and respected sir," replied the servant, in the oiliest terms imaginable. "Only a little further."

"Curse you! you have done nothing but say that all the while."

"Have I, Sir William? I am very sorry if I have done wrong in any way, sir, very sorry indeed. I am sure no one could regret more than I do the occurrence of the unfortunate accident; but then, ever honoured sir, accidents will happen."

"But where's the inn, I say? Curse walking, say I! James, d—n you, why don't you throw a light on the ground, so that I shan't soil my dress by stepping into the mud? Oh! d—n it, what's that?"

The elegant gentleman had suddenly and unexpectedly put his foot into a puddle, and the dirty water splashed up on to his white silk stockings, and completely spoiled the look of his magnificent shoes.

James immediately put on a look of great concern.

"Oh! dear," he said, "what a sad pity!"

"Sad pity be d—d! it's all your fault, you villain! Now, what am I to do with my clothes in this state? Answer me that, you villain, what am I to do?"

"Honoured sir, I know not; but perhaps at the inn the damage may be repaired."

"Oh! curse the inn! I wish I could see it."

"It's close at hand now, worshipful sir."

"Go on, then, and mind you show a light on the ground, so that I can see where I am walking."

"Yes, Sir William."

The strange pair passed on without either of them taking the slightest notice of the fugitives.

It might be that they were both so deeply occupied with themselves that they did not really see them.

"What do you think of that for a fine gentleman?" asked Jack, with assumed cheerfulness.

"I think him a contemptible wretch. How anyone can be so affected I cannot conceive."

"It does seem ridiculous, but it is such creatures as James who make these men what they really are."

"I suppose so. How he frowned upon him!"

"He did."

"But the gentleman was beautifully dressed!"

"He was, indeed. Doubtless he was on his way to some party or other when his carriage broke down, and that is the occasion of his vexation."

"Very likely."

"He is a wealthy person, I should think, judging by the respect with which he was treated, and the valuables he carried about him."

"Yes, and did you notice what a beautiful watch-chain he had? I saw it very plainly, for it fairly glittered in the torch-light."

"Yes, I saw it too, and that reminds me"—

"Of what?"

"He has got a good way down the road now, but it don't matter."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I wish I had asked him what time it was, but it isn't too late. You wait here a moment, and I will run down the road after him. I will soon find out what's o'clock."

CHAPTER CCXCV.

JACK SHEPPARD MAKES A GOOD BOOTY FROM SIR WILLIAM, TO THE DISMAY OF EDGORTH BESS.

BEFORE Edgorth Bess could say a word, or make any attempt to detain him, as she assuredly would have done, Jack Sheppard darted off down the road in the direction the gentleman and his servant had taken.

Seeing this, she did what was certainly the best thing she could do, and that was to obey Jack's hasty injunctions, and wait where she was until he returned.

At first no suspicion entered her mind that Jack's errand was anything different to what he had stated it to be.

But presently doubts began to cross her mind.

A turn in the road hid the gentleman from sight, and Jack soon disappeared.

Her doubts, having once commenced, rapidly increased in strength, more especially when some sounds, which sounded like those of conflict, reached her ear.

Although she dreaded the worst, she was too terrified to move, but sank down upon her knees in the roadway.

Leaving her thus, we will refer more particularly to Jack's proceedings.

As the reader may be tolerably certain, his business with the gentleman was something of more importance than merely ascertaining what o'clock it was.

He had merely devised that as a stratagem to get away from his companion, and a very clever one he thought it, for he had been puzzling his brains to invent some reason for turning back.

Chance, however, threw a good excuse in his way, and he availed himself of it instantly.

But he set off with all possible speed, so as not to allow Edgorth Bess any chance of opposing it.

When he turned round to run after the gentleman, he just caught a glimpse of him as he passed round a bend in the road.

Jack was fleet and light of foot, so he set on to run with full speed, taking care, however, to tread on the tips of his toes, so as to make as little noise as possible.

He soon came in sight of the gentleman again, and then he proceeded with greater circumspection.

He did not want them to be aware of his presence until he was, in a manner of speaking, actually upon them.

There seemed to be a strong probability of his being able to do this, for the servant was fully occupied with his master, and the master was fully occupied with himself.

At length Jack conceived he was near enough for his purpose.

He held a pistol in his hand, in readiness to do instant execution if necessary.

Giving one leap forward, he alighted close to the pair, and cried—

"Halt! or you are both dead men!"

These words were clearly and distinctly uttered, and it was evident that they carried their full meaning with them.

The servant and the gentleman stopped at once.

The light of the torch fell full upon Jack's figure.

"Murder!" cried the obsequious footman, as soon as he perceived him. "Murder! Thieves! Help!"

"Stop your row," said Jack. "Oh! you won't. Then take that!"

He seized the torch as he spoke, and, wresting it easily from the footman's feeble grasp, with one well-directed thrust sent the lighted end into his wide-open mouth.

The effect of this was, not only to extinguish the torch, but to extinguish the fellow's cries also.

He plumped down upon the ground at once, and rolled over and over in an extraordinary manner, while all the time he gave vent to some inarticulate and hideous groans.

Jack did not trouble himself any further with the footman, as he knew him to be completely discomfited, but, turning round, he clapped the muzzle of the pistol against the forehead of the astonished gentleman.

"Now, sir," he said, "be quick. Your life will be spared upon one condition."

"Murder!"

"Silence. If you utter such a cry again, that moment will be your last. Do you want me to spare your life?"

"Of course I do. Oh! dear! Could anything be more unfortunate?"

"Silence, I say! If you will hand over your purse, and whatever other articles of a valuable character which you carry about you, with the greatest dispatch, then your life will be spared; but if you refuse or linger, I shall blow your brains out, and rifle your pockets afterwards at my leisure."

The gentleman trembled visibly when he heard these words, pronounced, as they were, with all the firmness which Jack could throw into his voice.

"Spare my life!" he gasped, "spare my life!"

"On the conditions named, and no other," replied Jack; "fulfil them, and you are at liberty to depart instantly."

"Oh! dear! oh! dear!"

"No lamentations, but be quick, for I am in a hurry! Now then, I shall have to help you, I see."

With great dexterity, Jack proceeded to divest the gentleman of several of the valuable articles he wore.

He slipped out his massive scarf-pin, and possessed himself of his still more massive watch and chain; then he stripped his fingers of rings, and repeated his demands for his purse.

Awed by Jack's manner, Sir William no longer hesitated, but, plunging his hand into the inside pocket of his vest, drew forth a pocket-book.

Jack took it eagerly, but he said—

"Not so fast! not so fast! You carry a purse in addition to this pocket-book, I feel confident; so hand it to me at once, and then I will suffer you to depart."

With very bad grace, Sir William drew a purse from his breeches pocket.

Jack snatched it from his hand in a moment, and then he said—

"Now be off. I will count four, and if you are not a good way off by that time, I shall fire. Now, quick! Go!"

Considerably alarmed at this threat, Sir William set off to run; but he forgot all about the obsequious James, who lay prostrate in the roadway.

The consequence was, that he caught his foot against his extended body and fell over him, measuring his full length upon the ground.

He scrambled up again, however, almost before Jack was aware of what had taken place, and set off at full speed.

Obsequious James uttered a howl, and that reminded Jack of his existence.

"Get up," he said, dealing him a no very gentle kick in the ribs as he spoke. "Get up, you rascal, and run after your master there, or, if you don't, you are a dead footman."

James heard these words, and understood them too.

He sprang alacrily to his feet, and set off after his master at a speed that would have enabled him to win any race in christendom.

Jack could not forbear laughing heartily at this adventure, which promised to be very profitable to him.

He jingled the purse, which he still held in his hand; and to judge by its weight, it must have contained a large sum of money.

He did not stop to examine it, however, but at once consigned it to his pocket, together with the pistol which had rendered him such good service.

With a heart much lighter than he had felt for some time back, Jack hastened along the road towards the spot where he had left Edgworth Bess.

He began to feel some apprehensions for her safety, and to wish he had not left her, now that the necessity for doing so no longer existed.

In a low tone of voice, he ventured to call upon her name.

"Bess! Bess!" he cried, "where are you? Speak! It is I—Jack. I am here. Speak!"

All was still.

His heart seemed for a moment to cease to beat.

But, recovering himself with an effort, he repeated his cry, and this time met with a response.

With his mind relieved from a terrible weight, he hurried along the road, and then found that he had not gone far enough.

We have said that, after his departure, Edgworth Bess had heard the sounds of conflict, and had sunk down upon her knees.

It was in this position that Jack Sheppard found her.

He hastened to raise her to her feet.

"Oh Jack! Jack!" she exclaimed, recoiling from him, "what has happened?"

"Nothing!" replied Sheppard, who was filled with apprehension by her manner.

"Oh, Jack! how can you make me such a reply as that? I heard the sounds of conflict."

"Of conflict?"

"Yes! do not attempt to deny it; I know too well what you have done, Jack. You have committed another robbery."

Jack was silent.

"How can you be so wicked and so foolish? I had no idea of your intentions until it was too late, or else I should have intercepted you. But now"—

"Bess!" said Jack earnestly, "hear me first, but do not judge me! Will you hear me?"

"What have you to say?"

"To justify my conduct."

"You cannot do that."

"Will you give me the opportunity?"

"To justify a robbery—impossible!"

"Bess, hear me; hear me, I beseech you! Can you not comprehend our position? Blueskin is a prisoner in Wild's house in London."

"How do you know that?"

"I have no proof, but that is my conviction. Without such aid as we could afford him he may perish. We are here alone, helpless, penniless; we must get to London. From that place we are distant very many miles."

"Enough, enough!"

"Nay, hear me out. You are weary—so weary that you feel you cannot walk another mile. We have no means of riding or of paying for a shelter; besides all which, there is the necessity for our reaching London with the least possible delay."

"I know all that, Jack; but still that all is far, very far from justifying your crime; no circumstances could justify it."

"Nay, nay! you saw that fog—he elicited your contempt. I have taken from him nothing more than he can well spare. He will never feel his loss, and we shall be able to reach London with speed and comfort."

"Not with comfort, Jack—not with comfort! Oh! Jack, I would rather have sacrificed my life than you should have committed this last crime."

"These scruples are unworthy of you."

"No, Jack, they are not! If you love me you will make all the speed you can after that gentleman and restore him the articles of which you have despoiled him!"

"Nay, Bess, listen to me; such a course would be perilous in the extreme; no one would believe in my intentions, and I should be assuredly taken prisoner."

"Alas! alas!"

"Come, Bess, cheer up; you make more of this than the event really deserves. Had it been my first offence the case would have been different, but now one more can't much matter."

"Oh! Jack. You will break my heart if you talk like that, you will indeed."

"No, no!"

"But you will. And do you for a moment think that you are likely to succeed in your designs if you resort to crime and violence as the means of accomplishing them? Oh! no, no. Until you change, until you cast aside this mistaken policy, we shall never prosper!"

The poor girl could go no further.

Sobs and tears choked her utterance.

"You are ungrateful," said Jack. "It has been for your sake that I have done what I have, not for my own."

"Then, if I am to be the means of causing you to commit crime, it is best that we should part, and that at once, before further mischief is done. Farewell!"

"Never! never! I cannot suffer you to part from me thus. I will not do so. What has been done cannot be recalled. What would you have me do?"

Bess made no reply, but endeavoured to release her hand from the strong grasp which Jack kept upon it.

This, however, she found to be impossible.

Jack continued—

"Would you have me cast this money in the road now that I have obtained it? Surely no. Your own good sense must shrink from such an act as that is, when we are so badly off for money as we are. The deed is done! Let us now turn it to the best advantage."

"Jack!"

"What, dearest?"

"I am convinced that until you change your tactics we shall never succeed. Look at your scheme for obtaining those ingots of silver. What trouble and danger they brought us into without doing us the least good, for we lost them after all. No, Jack; the curse of stolen property clung to them, and produced nothing but misfortune to their possessors."

"What shall I do?"

"Jack, we are struggling for justice; but how can we reasonably lay claim to it when we are ourselves violators of its precepts? It is monstrous and ridiculous."

"But you have not told me what I am to do."

"I adjure you to forsake such ways. No longer render yourself obnoxious to the laws of your country."

"Your will is my law."

"Fling away, then, all those things which you have taken. Rely upon it, if you do so, our position will be better."

"Hark!" cried Jack. "What is that?"

A rumbling sound came upon their ears, and the next moment the stage-coach going towards London came round the bend in the road.

Bess was silent, and looked at the vehicle.

She was not prepared, however, for what Jack was about to do.

He hailed the coach, and, before she had time to utter any remonstrances, it stopped, the door was opened, and Jack lifted her in, almost by main force.

Ere she could recover her composure, the vehicle was set in motion again, and then, leaning back in her seat, she clasped her hands over her face, and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

CHAPTER CCXCVI.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON VISIT THE LAWYER'S CHAMBERS IN THE TEMPLE IN SEARCH OF THE MISSING PAPERS.

"Oh! you're taking it easy at last, I see."

Such was the remark made by Wild, junior, on the night of the projected expedition to the Temple, when, on descending the stairs, fully equipped, he found his respected parent sitting down in an attitude of deep thought.

Jonathan raised his head, and glared fiercely at him—fiercely enough, indeed, to have intimidated anyone.

But Wild, junior, was not very easily intimidated, so, taking no notice at all, he walked across the room and sat down in a chair opposite his father.

For a moment the precious pair looked at each other in silence.

George was the first to speak.

"Well, guv'nor," he said, "easy does it, you know; but, whenever you are ready, I am waiting."

"What hour is it?" growled the thief-taker.

"About half-past ten."

"Then it's about time we started."

"Just as you think proper, guv'nor."

"Are you armed?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"I am."

"But, guv'nor, you don't expect we shall have to make a fight of it, do you?"

"I don't anticipate such a thing, but we ought to be prepared."

"Of course. Always guard against accidents."

Jonathan smiled grimly.

"Are you sure," asked his son, after a moment's pause, "that you know just whereabouts this lawyer's chambers are in the Temple?"

"Oh! yes. No. 12, Pump-court. Third floor."

"Oh! that's the address?"

"Yes."

"How did you find it out?"

"I have once been there."

"Better and better. We shan't have to go beating about the bush so much."

"It is an advantage, certainly."

"A very great one. Why, you will be able to walk right up to the door of his chambers without the least delay or hesitation."

"Of course."

"And I daresay, now, on the occasion of your visit, you took notice of the fastenings on the door, thinking that, sometime or other, perhaps, a little knowledge on the point would be valuable."

Jonathan grinned in his usual disagreeable fashion when anything of a complimentary character was said to him.

"I have some recollection on the point, but that don't matter now. Time is going on. We must be starting."

"As I observed before, guv'nor, when you are ready I am waiting."

"Let us be off at once, then."

Jonathan rose to his feet as he spoke; his son immediately followed his example.

Without any farther delay, they went down stairs, and out at the front door into Newgate-street.

As they gained the pavement, they heard St. Sepulchre's church strike the hour of eleven.

This was a signal for them to quicken their steps.

Jonathan Wild led the way, in almost a direct line, to his destination.

The distance was not very great.

He entered the Temple by the gate near Temple Bar, because, as he well knew, the others were closed before this hour.

Upon arriving at this place, he found even this gate was closed; but the watchman was there, and he lost no time in summoning him.

"There's no admittance to the Temple at this hour," said the watchman, who saw at a glance that the applicants for admission were not ordinary inhabitants of the place.

He had the curiosity, however, to raise his lantern to look who it was that sought an entrance at such an unusual hour.

As he did this, Jonathan Wild took off his hat, and allowed the whole of his physiognomy to be exposed.

The light of the watchman's lantern fell in full force upon his countenance, which Jonathan screwed up into a hideous shape.

The watchman knew him.

That was evident by the kind of fright which he exhibited, and the rapid alteration which his manner underwent.

"Oh! dear," he gasped. "Is it really you, Mr. Wild? I didn't know you at first, sir; indeed I didn't. What did your honour's worship please to want?"

"Admittance," said Jonathan, sharply.

"Oh! dear, yes, sir; of course. You can have admittance to the Temple at any hour you think proper. Wait a moment, worshipful sir, and I will go and fetch the keys. I won't be a moment, Mr. Wild."

"Be off, then!"

The old watchman hobbled off under the gateway, and Wild, junior, touched his father on the arm, as he said—

"I say, guv'nor."

"What now?"

"Don't think you have gone the best way to work."

"How do you mean?"

"We are on secret service."

"Well?"

"Then, you should have kept your visit a secret. When the papers are missed, this will be recollected."

"Bah!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, that it's more than the watchman's life is worth to say I have been here if I caution him to keep the matter a secret."

"Oh!"

"Didn't you see how eager he was to let me in?"

"Yes. I suppose, then, guv'nor, you happen to know one or two things that he would not like to be made public?"

"That's it."

"Well, guv'nor, I really will give you credit for being what I always said you were—a wonderful man."

"Hush! here he comes."

There was the sound of footsteps, and the faint flashing of a light.

Jonathan and his son both relapsed into silence.

"Here's the key, respected sir," said the watchman, thrusting it with nervous eagerness into the lock; "here's the key—that's it."

He opened the gate.

The two Wilds passed through in a moment.

"Fasten it after us," said the thief-taker.

"All right, sir."

The gate was relocked.

"Can I show you anywhere, sir?" asked the watchman.

"Yes, come here a moment; I want to speak to you."

The watchman drew close.

As soon as he was near enough, Jonathan clutched him with painful tightness by the arm and drew him towards him.

Then, putting his mouth close to the watchman's ear, whose face was now the very picture of alarm, he said—

"John Gordon."

"Ye—yes, Mr. Wild."

"Do you think you shall recollect this visit of mine?"

"Ye—yes, Mr. Wild."

"Very well, then. I want it kept a secret. Do you understand?"

"Ye—yes, Mr. Wild."

These few trembling words were all he seemed to have the power to utter.

"I say, I want my visit here to-night kept a secret," repeated Jonathan. "No one is aware of it but yourself. If, however, I find that it becomes known at any time, I shall lay the fault to you. Do you hear?"

"Ye—yes, Mr. Wild."

"Then I shall bring forward that little affair of the communion-service which was stolen from the sacristy. You know all about that, John Gordon?"

"Mercy, Mr. Wild, have mercy."

"Of course, I shall have mercy, but only just as long as you keep the secret of my presence here to-night."

With these words, Jonathan released his hold of the watchman's arm, and strode away into the recesses of the building.

John Gordon sank down in such a state of absolute fright that it was really pitiable to see him.

Jonathan was right in thinking he could trust him to keep his secret.

The thief-taker was well aware whereabouts Pump-court was situated, and he went towards it with a rapid and confident step.

Having settled the matter of the watchman in what he considered was a highly satisfactory manner, he gave way to a little elation.

He turned to the left, into the narrow place known by the name of Pump-court.

Proceeding to its extremity, he paused before a door which stood at one corner.

This door stood wide open, after the usual custom, and a flight of dark, steep stairs was disclosed beyond.

Jonathan beckoned to his son to follow him, and, as lightly as a foot could fall, made his way up the staircase.

But, in spite of all his caution, the woodwork would creak beneath his feet.

This, however, was nothing to be alarmed at, for if anyone had been in any of the chambers and heard them ascending, they would have paid no attention to a circumstance which occurred so frequently.

The third floor was at length reached, and here Jonathan paused.

The place was in almost utter darkness, but his memory served him well; and, assisted by it and by his eyesight, he made out the position of the door.

Jonathan, however, before he advanced a step, pressed something into his son's hands.

"It's a mask," he said, in a faint whisper; "put it on, and then, if we should happen to be surprised, our features will not be recognised."

George Wild took the article in silence, and put it on; while, by the movements of his father, he could tell he was doing the same thing.

As soon as he had concluded this operation, Jonathan stole silently across the landing in the direction of the door, and placed his ear against the panel.

He listened attentively, but no sound from within reached his ears.

At length he was satisfied, by the dead silence that prevailed, that there was no one in the apartment beyond.

Having come to this conclusion, he felt for the fastenings.

There was a knob which he turned, but the door did not yield, thus showing that it was either locked or bolted.

Wild conjectured that the latter was more likely to prove the case.

The lock he knew, by a previous observation, to be nothing but a clumsy common one; so he did not even trouble to find a skeleton key, as he might have done, but inserted a picklock into the keyhole.

In the use of this, and, indeed, of all other burglarious instruments, Jonathan Wild was an adept.

He exhibited his skill on the present occasion, for having rattled the pick in the lock for a moment, there was a sharp snip, which showed that the bolt of the lock had been shot back.

After the performance of this feat, he remained silent and listening; but nothing of an alarming character reaching his ears, he once more ventured to turn the knob.

To his gratification, the door yielded.

He crossed the threshold in a moment, with his son close at his heels, and then he closed the door after him.

His first injunction was to his son, whom he bade light the lantern.

While he was thus occupied, the thief-taker himself passed his hand over the door, and quickly encountered a bolt, which he hastily shot into its socket.

They were then secure from intrusion in that quarter.

By the time he had done this, Wild, junior, had lighted the lantern, which soon gave forth a bright and steady light.

It was with the aid of this that the delightful pair took a look about them.

They found themselves in an apartment fitted up as an office.

It was quite vacant.

"This is the outer office, where the clerk sits," whispered Wild. "I don't suppose we shall find what we want here?"

"There is another room, then, guv'nor?"

"Yes, that is where Mr. Mudford himself sits and holds his consultations."

"That is the place for us, then. Where is it?"

"Yonder is the door."

"Good. I see it."

"Be cautious. There might, perchance, be some one in the inner room, though it is not very likely; still, we cannot be too careful."

"Right, guv'nor."

On tiptoe they now crossed the outer office, and approached the green-baize door leading into the inner one.

At this Wild again listened, but finding no sound came from within, he again came to the conclusion that the office was empty.

Acting upon this supposition, he opened the door, which he found yielded readily to his touch.

To his surprise and consternation, however, a flash of light came from within, and a voice cried out, in rather startled accents—

"Who is there?"

A curse came from Jonathan Wild's lips, and he dashed the door wide open.

As he did so, the interior of the inner office was disclosed.

On the table was a reading-lamp, and it was from this that the light Wild had seen had come.

Seated at this table, with a book before him, was a man of about fifty years of age, whom Jonathan immediately recognised as being the attorney belonging to the chambers, Mr. William Mudford.

He started to his feet in alarm when he saw by what kind of characters his sanctum was invaded, for the black masks which Wild and his son had put on gave them a very ferocious appearance.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE RESULT OF JONATHAN WILD'S SEARCH FOR THE MISSING PAPERS IN THE LAWYER'S CHAMBERS.

MR. WILLIAM MUDFORD never experienced such a shock of surprise in all his life before as he did when he saw the thief-taker and his son appear upon the threshold.

He was engaged upon a very important case, which was to come on for hearing the next day, and he had taken advantage of the silence of night to retire to his chambers.

Determined not to be disturbed, he had dismissed his clerk and locked the outer door.

Then he sat down to a quiet consideration of the important business before him.

The case was a very intricate one, and had cost him a great deal of trouble; besides, he had had only a short time to "get it up," as lawyers phrase it.

To do this he had been compelled to sacrifice several nights' sleep, and as he now sat poring over the pages he had fallen fast asleep.

It was during this slumber that Jonathan made his

in, and that without awaking him, though he disturbed him slightly.

His first knowledge of Jonathan's appearance dated from the time when the inner door opened.

Now, Mr. Mudford was rather a timid man. Indeed, in a contest he greatly preferred to rely upon intellectual rather than physical strength.

Therefore, when he saw the apparition of two well-armed men, both masked, he experienced extreme terror, and would gladly have sunk through the floor if he could.

As for making any resistance, the thought of doing such a thing as that never once entered into his head.

He stood glaring at the intruders in ludicrous fright.

Jonathan Wild saw at a glance that there was nothing to be apprehended from him.

Deliberately, then, he drew a pistol, and, cocking it, said—

"Mr. Mudford, if you utter one cry, or make the least attempt to escape, that moment will be your last. I will plaster the wall with your brains."

At this awful threat, Mr. Mudford's terror visibly increased.

His teeth chattered, and his knees smote each other.

Jonathan made a sign to his son, who at once slipped round the table and grasped Mr. Mudford by the arm, who, apprehensive of the worst consequences, could not refrain from uttering an ejaculation of fright.

"Be quiet," said Wild, junior. "Take it easy, and no harm will be done you."

Somewhat comforted by this assurance, Mr. Mudford prepared to submit himself to his fate with the best grace he could.

Finding him thus tractable, he was quickly bound.

They tied him hand and foot, blindfolded him, and gagged him.

While in this very helpless state they lifted him up, and, carrying him to a remote corner of the apartment, they laid him down.

Being thus disposed of, they turned their attention to the original object of their visit.

The chamber was fitted up after the style of most lawyers' offices.

On a shelf placed at no great distance from the ceiling were several tin boxes, all of which were carefully secured with padlocks.

They were those sort of boxes in which title-deeds and other valuable papers are generally kept.

Every one had a name painted upon them.

Jonathan Wild took the lantern, and holding it up so that its beams fell upon these boxes, he, one after the other, perused the names which were painted upon them.

At length he found one upon which the two words, "Donnull" and "Private" appeared.

Wild, junior, saw this box the same moment as his father, and he said—

"That's the ticket, guv'nor! Wait a moment, and I'll soon have the gentleman down."

He placed a chair in a convenient position as he spoke, and, mounting upon it, he lifted down the box, which was not so heavy as one would have thought from its appearance.

Jonathan watched all these proceedings with very great interest, and occupied himself, with holding the light to his son.

What Mr. Mudford thought of: these extraordinary proceedings would be hard to say.

Wild, junior, descended from the chair with the box in his hands, and placed it down upon the table, though in so doing he overturned the reading-lamp, so that all the light they now had proceeded from the dark lantern.

This, however, was quite sufficient for their purpose.

When the box was fairly on the table, Jonathan reigned the lamp to his son, and set about making an examination of the lock.

It seemed to be of rather an intricate character, so he did not stop to try to unlock it, but took from his pocket a small steel crowbar.

This was in two pieces, which screwed together.

They then formed a very formidable instrument.

Jonathan Wild inserted the point of this weapon in between the lid and the box, and, after some little trouble, succeeded in forcing it open.

When the lid was raised, it disclosed a quantity of papers.

Subduing whatever eagerness he might have felt to have turned these over hastily, Jonathan took them up one by one, and put them down again after having carefully examined them.

This was a rather tedious operation, but Jonathan Wild did not mind his trouble in the present instance, when so much of importance was at issue.

As the quantity of papers in the box diminished, however, Jonathan's anxiety increased in a corresponding degree.

His son was scarcely less anxious than himself.

There were many papers of great interest connected with the Donnull family, and Jonathan would gladly enough have perused them, only his impatience would not permit him to do more than take a casual glance at their contents.

At length, having almost emptied the box, the thief-taker espied, lying in the bottom of it, a small packet, carefully tied up with red tape.

It was just such a parcel as he conceived the papers he was in quest of would make.

He pounced upon it like a vulture.

He turned it over before he attempted to open it, but there was no superscription of any kind to give him an idea of its contents.

The red tape with which it was secured was sealed in many places with a large red seal.

This Jonathan examined, and found the impression to be the crest of the Donnull family.

His heart beat high with hope.

At last he thought he had the important papers, for which he so ardently sought, securely within his grasp.

He could scarcely command his impatience to open the envelope, which, being made of parchment, would not tear or give way in the least.

He was forced to open it in the proper way.

When the outer envelope was removed, Jonathan found there was an inner one, upon which appeared some writing.

Eagerly he attempted to decipher it, and called out to his son, with an oath, to direct all the beams of the lantern upon it.

The writing was very distinct.

The words were as follow:—

"I have instructed my solicitor, Mr. William Mudford, to deliver this packet into the hands of a police-magistrate in the event of the occurrence of certain circumstances. The fact of this packet being received will be sufficient evidence to show that the circumstances alluded to have taken place. It is my desire that the papers enclosed be carefully perused, in order that tardy justice may be done to the persecuted suffering one."

Jonathan Wild read these words half-aloud, and Wild, junior, who looked over his shoulder, was scarcely able to follow him as he read.

As soon as he had finished, the thief-taker looked up into the countenance of his son.

Wild, junior, looked at him again, and then said—

"That looks remarkably like what you want, eh, guv'nor?"

"I have them at last," said the thief-taker, in whose mind there did not remain any doubt as to whether the packet really contained the papers of which he desired to get possession.

He took that for granted.

"I shouldn't wonder if you have not got the right pig by the ear," said Wild, junior; "but I would not make cock sure."

"There is no doubt about the matter," said the thief-taker; "the superscription is quite sufficient to set all doubts at rest."

"It seems so. But I need not remind you, guv'nor, there's many a slip between the cup and the lip, so that if I was in your place I should not indulge in any hopes that might turn out to be false ones, but open the packet at once."

There was generally sound common-sense in what George Wild said.

In the present instance his father felt the full force and weight of his remarks.

There was no fear of an interruption, and why should he not seize upon the present opportunity to ascertain



[JONATHAN WILD MAKES A PROPOSITION TO BLUESKIN.]

whether the packet really contained the papers he thought it did or not.

It would be better to feel quite confident upon the point, though. Until his son spoke, it had never occurred to Jonathan that there could be the slightest doubt.

Now, such could hardly be the case.

The inner envelope was merely a paper one, so the thief-taker had little or no difficulty in tearing it open.

It contained several papers, all neatly folded up to the same size, and tied round the middle with red tape.

Each paper appeared to have its contents labelled upon it outside.

The topmost one attracted Wild's instant attention.

The words written upon it were these—

"A confession of the means by which I removed the infant heiress to the Donnull estates, and took possession of them myself; together with other matters connected with Jonathan Wild, of whose villanies there is a full exposure."

"Well, I'm d—d, guv'nor," ejaculated George, "you

have lighted on a sure thing at last, eh? Just what I told you. What's the next paper?"

Jonathan turned them over rapidly.

"We will not stop to read them now," he said. "They are certainly the papers I require."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh! yes."

"That's all right. Didn't you say you wanted the will?"

"Yes."

"Is that among the papers in the packet?"

Jonathan once more turned them over, one by one.

"No," he said, at length. "The will does not appear to be there."

"I should think it's rather important you should have it, guv'nor."

"Highly important."

"So I think. Just look about you. We are more likely to find it here than anywhere else."

Jonathan consented to this, and consigned the packet of papers to his pocket.

One or two more documents remained in the bottom of the tin box, and these Jonathan took up carefully, in the hope each time of finding what he sought.

But each time, after a brief examination of the paper, he was forced to put it down disappointed.

The interest which Wild, junior, took in this affair was really most intense, but no doubt he had some peculiar object in view.

Time, however, will determine.

At last there remained but one paper in the box, and that Wild was certain, by the very appearance which it presented, was not the will.

Nevertheless, he took up the paper and read the inscription.

He was disappointed.

It was of not the slightest value to him; nor was it even remotely connected with the matter in hand.

"No go, guv'nor," said George.

"No, it is not there."

"And are you sure it is not among the papers you have taken out and put on the table?"

"Oh! yes. Besides, you looked at them as well as myself."

"I know I did."

"I don't think, then, that we are very likely to have overlooked it."

"No; and yet such a thing might have been. Look here, guv'nor. I'll tell you what we'll do."

"What?"

"Why, put the papers back into the box again, one by one, and then I should think we should be quite sure."

"It would be no harm to do so."

"None at all."

Jonathan Wild at once proceeded to act upon this hint.

He was not without a slight hope that the document had escaped his former search.

Each paper was now scrutinized with redoubled attention, but all in vain.

The last was put into the box, but no will could be found.

"That hope's gone, guv'nor. What shall we do now?"

"I know not. Give up the search."

"Not a bit of it. I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"If the will is in existence, I will wager my life the lawyer knows where it is to be found."

"Ah!"

"And, if so, we will threaten to blow his brains out if he does not discover it to us, and, rely upon it, we shall find the will."

"Of course," said Wild, and, as he spoke, he rushed across the office to the corner where Mr. Mudford had been deposited.

He uttered a cry of astonishment and rage, which was echoed by one from his son.

The lawyer had disappeared.

CHAPTER CCXCVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON FIND THEMSELVES SURROUNDED BY DANGER IN THE TEMPLE CHAMBERS.

FOR about the space of a moment, Jonathan Wild and his son gazed at each other with the most absolute amazement depicted on their countenances.

They could scarcely believe the evidence of their own senses.

By what magic could he have got away?

This question seemed a very difficult one, but, like a good many apparently difficult questions, the solution was easy enough.

The lawyer had been bound very hastily, but yet the thief-taker and his son thought securely.

Such, however, was not the case.

For one thing, they thought the lawyer's fright would be too great to permit him to make the least effort towards releasing himself.

Mr. Mudford, however, when he got a little calmer, resolved to try what could be done.

Now, Jonathan and his son were both too intently occupied in examining the contents of the two boxes to pay any attention to slight sounds, or even to hear them.

For the moment they forgot all about the lawyer.

He, however, quietly wriggled his arms about until he had freed them from the bonds by which they were confined.

When he once had his hands at liberty, the rest was perfectly easy.

The reader must not forget that Wild, junior, had overturned the lamp that was burning upon the table, and extinguished it.

This was a very favourable circumstance for the lawyer, since it was the means of preventing his movements being visible.

The light which came from the lamp was diffused all over the apartment, while that which came in through the lens of the dark lantern was concentrated into one beam of light.

This, while it allowed the two Wilds to see what they were about, plunged the remainder of the apartment into a profound darkness.

Such being the state of affairs, it is easy to conceive that the attorney, having got his hands at liberty, was not long in removing his other bonds.

He tore the handkerchief from his eyes, and removed the gag from his mouth.

He saw how intent the two masked intruders were upon the contents of the box, and he resolved upon the adoption of a particular line of conduct.

The door which led into the outer office was only a short distance from him.

It was ajar, too.

Towards this, then, he crawled inch by inch.

The floor of the office was covered with a thick matting, so that he made no noise whatever in his progress.

He reached the door, and quietly opened it wide enough to allow his body to pass through.

In fine, he managed to reach the outer door of the chambers unperceived.

To withdraw the bolt and then descend the stairs, with all the speed he was capable of making, were things that followed each other as a matter of course.

Rushing along the court, he reached the outer gates in the utmost disorder.

The porter who had admitted Wild had been in a state of the greatest perturbation ever since.

He did not refuse, however, to open the gates and allow Mr. Mudford to pass through.

That gentleman's idea was to run as fast as his legs would carry him in the direction of Bow-street, at which place he made sure of finding a constable.

Just as he was passing under Temple Bar he met three persons.

In the semi-darkness he recognised them.

They were Bow-street runners.

A few words served to make them acquainted with the aspect of affairs, and they requested Mr. Mudford to lead the way to his chambers with all speed, when, they assured him, they would soon capture the midnight intruders.

Comforted by this assurance—for there were papers of immense value and importance in the boxes, and he could not tell which particular box it was they had taken down—he hastened back, desirous of preventing them getting off with any documents in their possession.

The three constables and himself reached the outer door of the chambers just at the moment when Wild and his son discovered his absence.

Their position was more critical than they imagined.

The first impulse of both, as soon as they had recovered somewhat from their surprise, was to rush into the outer office, for they did not conceive it possible that the attorney had got any further than that.

As soon as they entered it, however, the door leading on to the landing at the top of the stairs was dashed open, and the officers entered the apartment.

They saw Jonathan and his son, and the precious pair saw them.

For a moment the great thief-taker was taken aback—so great did the suddenness of the attack surprise him.

But, recovering himself, he beat a precipitate retreat into the inner office, and, closing the door, bolted it after him.

He was only just in time, for the officers came with a tremendous rush against it, which threatened to burst it from its hinges.

By this time Jonathan as fully comprehended what had

taken place as though he had been an eye-witness of the whole of it.

What was he to do?

Should he adopt the bold course of action of proclaiming at once who he was, and preferring a charge against the attorney of having treasonous papers in his possession?

That was his first idea, but he discarded it as soon as it was formed.

He wished to keep secret, if he possibly could, the fact of his having paid a visit to the Temple on that particular evening.

Accordingly having seen that all had been done towards securing the green-baize door that could be done, he looked all round him in search of some means of making his escape.

But none presented themselves.

He ran first to the window.

He saw that it commanded a view of the Temple-gardens, with the Thames beyond; but the distance to the ground was something alarming.

Nor could he see any means by which he could accomplish a descent.

In the meantime the police-officers hammered away at the door, and called upon them to surrender; but they made no attempt to break into the room.

They had two desperate men to deal with, they felt confident; and, having been assured that it was a matter of impossibility for them to leave the inner chamber, where they had sought refuge, they determined to imprison them, and despatched Mr. Mudford for reinforcements.

Had Jonathan Wild been aware of this, he would have set about making his escape with much greater coolness than he did.

A thorough examination of the room having failed to show him any means by which it could be left, he was, as a matter of course, driven back to the window.

As he looked down, he thought it impossible to reach the ground without running a much greater risk of breaking his neck than he felt inclined to do.

In this opinion he was well supported by his son.

Peering down, however, they perceived that the sill of the window below them, which was on the second floor, was rather a wide one.

Then, along the row of windows on the first floor, there was a balcony.

Now, Wild thought, if he could only gain the window-sill beneath him, he should be able to lower himself from that, and drop upon the balcony underneath.

Once there, to reach the ground would be an easy matter; and then, he thought, as soon as his feet touched the ground, he should be able to set pursuit at defiance.

He communicated this desperate scheme to his son, who, however much he may have disliked it, was compelled to accede to its adoption or remain where he was and be taken prisoner.

To this, it is almost needless to say, he had the strongest aversion.

With great speed and energy, Jonathan Wild tore down the two dingy red curtains which hung before the window, and tied them both together.

One end he fastened securely to the frame of the window, and the other end he lowered out, and was rejoiced to find it reach within a short distance only of the second-floor window-sill.

A struggle was near taking place as to who should descend first, but Wild, junior, had the good sense to give way, instead of prolonging their stay by a needless dispute, until the chance of making their escape was gone.

Jonathan Wild then got out of the window, and slowly lowered his body down the rope.

He felt giddy and sick when he thought how frail was the rope, which alone prevented him from being precipitated to the earth.

But Jonathan Wild was not destined to come to his death in that manner or on that occasion; and so, desperate and impossible as the achievement seemed, he reached the window-sill in safety.

The remainder of his task was, however, by no means easy.

He had to lower himself until his hands grasped the edge of the window-sill.

But he accomplished this; and then, hanging to the full length of his arms, he let go, and alighted on the balcony beneath.

By the time he had done that, his son had got down almost the whole length of the curtain.

The police-officers in the next room must have had some suspicion of what was taking place, for they flung open the window and looked out.

They caught sight of both in a moment; and, fearful they would escape them before assistance arrived, drew their pistols and fired.

The shots were not productive of any harm to Wild and his son in a personal sense, for they were not even scratched; but the report would have the effect of rousing all the inhabitants of that quiet spot.

Cursing their officiousness, Jonathan Wild clambered over the balcony, and dropped on to the ground.

He was joined in less than a moment by his son, who had been rendered extraordinarily expeditious by the shots.

He thought the next time a pistol was fired he might not escape so well.

He reached the ground unhurt, however.

But it was quite clear that the alarm was fast becoming general, for lights kept appearing with wondrous rapidity at the different casements.

Wild's troubles were not over yet.

They had escaped from the chambers, it is true, but they were still in the large mass of buildings known as the Temple.

The thief-taker did not require to be told that every avenue leading from the Temple would be guarded.

It was no good for him to think of making his exit by any of the ordinary gates.

But there was the river.

He thought he should be able to reach this some time before his pursuers.

Then there was a chance whether, at that hour of the night, he should be able to obtain a boat.

He did not, however, hesitate and consider long about this.

The river was his only resource, and he was driven to it.

He took his course in a direct line, heedless of the many obstacles that opposed themselves to such a mode of progress.

At length the terrace was reached.

The surface of the water looked dark and gloomy.

There were many boats upon it, just faintly distinguishable, but they were all on the opposite side, where they were moored.

Loud cries came from behind them, and, looking round, they saw a number of persons in full pursuit of them.

They seemed now to be in as great a difficulty as ever.

But Wild, recollecting that one end of the terrace must be very near the Temple-stairs, made his way towards it at full speed.

He had faint hopes of finding a boat there, and being able to hail it.

On reaching the east end of the terrace, he peered over, and fancied he could discern the outlines of a wherry, which was fastened by a chain to the stairs.

"There's no time to hail the boat, guv'nor," said Wild, junior. "They are too close behind us. How is the tide?"

"At the ebb."

"Very well, climb over the railing, and drop into the river. We must wade or swim to the boat, and cast off ourselves."

"Agreed. Come on."

Wild saw that this was about the best thing that could be done.

The rapidity with which both got over the spiked palings, and dropped into the muddy bed of the Thames, was really amazing.

The police-officers, seeing their prey after all about to slip through their fingers, made the utmost exertion to come up with them.

But, before they reached the end of the terrace, Wild and his son had both waded to the boat and got into it.

They were greeted with a loud shout from some one who already occupied the boat.

It was the boatman, who had gone to sleep in the bottom of it.

This cry had the effect of pointing out the whereabouts of the fugitives to the officers.

They fired a volley in the direction, but, unheeding it, Wild and his son cast off, and, by means of a dozen strokes, got so far out into the stream as to set pursuit at defiance.

CHAPTER CCXCIX.

SHOWS HOW JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON REACHED HOME IN SAFETY, AND HOW THE LATTER OUTWITTED THE FORNER.

THE boatman was quite at a loss to understand what was the meaning of the events then in progress, but Jonathan adopted a ready means of reaching his understanding.

He took from his pocket a purse, which he put into the hands of the waterman, saying as he did so—

“That purse contains at least ten guineas. Take it—it is yours. All you have got to do in return is just to sit still in the boat, without making a noise!”

The boatman comprehended these words.

Indeed, they were spoken in too clear and emphatic a tone for there to be the least possibility of their being mistaken.

Moreover, there was the purse, which he clutched eagerly in his hand, for the man was poor, and ten pounds seemed to him like an inexhaustible fortune.

He remained quiet and still, then, as he was bid.

Both the thief-taker and his son knew how to handle an oar with dexterity, so they took one each.

They now felt quite safe, for the boat they had secured was the only one within sight.

Such being the case, Jonathan did not feel disposed to exert himself or to remain on the water.

He directed the course of the boat to the next landing-place down the stream.

This he reached in a few moments, and, leaping out of the boat, they left the waterman to make the best he could of his unexpected good fortune.

With all the speed they were capable of, they made their way towards Newgate-street, and reached the door of the thief-taker's house unmolested and in safety.

Jonathan Wild was highly delighted with the result of his evening's excursion, and his spirits underwent a corresponding elevation.

His good temper was increased when, on entering, he was assured by Quilt Arnold that all was well, and that no circumstance whatever of an alarming character had taken place.

Having assured himself of this, he went upstairs, accompanied by his son, and had a glass and a pipe together in the sanctum.

Here they talked over their night's achievements.

Jonathan was getting more pleased with his son every day, and he felt inclined to trust him more and more.

On the present occasion he gave him an insight into all his intended future proceedings, not a word of which was lost upon his hearer.

Just as day was beginning to break they separated, and both sought some repose, for it was impossible for them not to feel their fatigue.

Not a word had been said by either about the papers.

George took good care not to do so, and his father never mentioned them.

But upon entering his bed-chamber, Wild, junior, locked the door, and said—

“What a d—d fool the gov'nor must be to trust me like he does! However, I can't help it. It's no concern of mine. We shall see how things turn out. First, however, I will find a hiding-place for these.”

As he uttered these words, he drew from his coat-pocket the packet of papers Jonathan had been at such trouble to obtain, and which he felt so much elation at being in possession of.

“He hasn't discovered his loss yet,” said George, as he turned the package over and over in his hands. “That just proves the truth of what I have so often said. It shows what a d—d fool he is. Now, if I had been him, and had got these papers, I should have looked in my pockets every five minutes to be sure that they were safe.”

He paused.

“However, here they are, and I mean to take good care of them, too. They are of vast importance, there can be no sort of mistake about that; and it is my duty, of

course, to make the most of them that I possibly can.”

With these words on his lips, Wild, junior, looked round the apartment in search of some place that would be suitable to hide the packet of papers.

How and when he had managed to obtain possession of them, heaven only knows.

He must have taken advantage of some moment when his father's pre-occupation was extreme to abstract them from the pocket into which they had been somewhat carelessly thrust.

At any rate, he held in his hands those papers which were so vital to the interest of Edgworth Bess.

He held in his hands a full confession of Lord Donmull's guilt, from first to last, including all the dealings he had had with the thief-taker.

We have seen that Jonathan Wild and his son were both under the impression that the packet had been left with Mr. Mudford, with instructions that he should open it in case Lord Donmull did not make his appearance within some specified time.

But such was scarcely the case.

Lord Donmull's instructions when he left the packet with the attorney were these.

The packet was not to be opened until he (Mr. Mudford) had received proof of Lord Donmull's death, and that, when that occurred, the packet was to be taken to one of the chief police-magistrates.

So that a great deal of the alarm which the thief-taker felt was groundless.

George Wild looked round and round the room several times before he could find a place suitable for his purpose.

He was thus engaged, and quite undecided, when his ears were saluted with a terrific yell, which a stranger would have declared came from the throat of some ferocious denizen of the forest.

But George knew better.

“The devil!” he ejaculated, “he's found out his loss now! What on earth shall I do with this packet?”

He looked round once more, but without being able to find an answer to his question.

He was convinced that there was no time to be lost, for he could hear a heavy footstep approaching.

“That's the gov'nor,” he said. “I must put it somewhere, that's certain. Perhaps this will do.”

He turned down the bed-clothes as he spoke, and thrust the package between the sheets.

He had scarcely done so, and returned the bed to its ordinary appearance, when his bed-room door was flung open, and his respected parent stalked in.

The countenance of the great thief-taker was something terrible to look upon.

Even his son was appalled.

It was distorted by the most fiendish rage.

He made one rush forward, and clutched his son tightly by the throat.

Then, while he held him in that position, he cried—

“Confess, villain! confess at once! What have you done with the packet of papers? Tell me, or I will twist your villainous head off!”

Wild, junior, glared at his father with well-affected amazement.

He made one effort to speak, but the pressure upon his throat was too great to allow him to do so.

Blinded with rage as he was, Jonathan saw this, and slightly relaxed his grip.

“Tell me!” he yelled, at the same moment. “What have you done with those papers?”

“Me?” said Wild, junior, with the utmost astonishment portrayed in his tone and manner.

“Yes, you.”

“Why, gov'nor, you must be mad.”

“Do not patter with me, villain. Your life hangs upon a thread.”

“No, d—n it, gov'nor; easy does it!”

“Curses! Do not think of imposing upon me any longer. I know you—know you for a venomous reptile, which I have warmed in my bosom until it has turned round and stung me.”

“Oh! d—n it, gov'nor, you're mad! Let go my throat, I say! Murder! Help!”

“Silence!” cried the thief-taker, fiercely.

“Silence be d—d! Do you think I am such a

fool as to allow you to take my life without opening my mouth?"

He struggled violently as he spoke, and succeeded in getting free from the thief-taker's grasp.

But this result was not so much due to his superior strength or courage as it was to the fact that Jonathan's rage was beginning to cool a little.

Wild, junior, however, hastened to place the bed between him and his exasperated parent; and when he had entrenched himself in this tolerably secure position he said—

"Now, guv'nor, take it easy, and just tell us what is the matter. I don't understand your manner. Do you mean to say you have lost that packet of papers you found at the lawyer's?"

"Yes, and no one is better acquainted with the fact than yourself. You have taken them. You know it, so do not attempt to deny it."

"Don't be a d—d fool, guv'nor—don't be a d—d fool. Just as if it was likely that I should take the papers. What good would they be to me?"

"If you haven't taken them, who has?"

"How should I know, guv'nor? Come, now, don't be a fool. I can't believe what you say."

"What?"

"That you have lost the papers."

"I have."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite certain."

"Then it's a d—d unlucky circumstance, that's all I can say about it."

Jonathan Wild looked keenly at his son.

The words he had just uttered were spoken with such well-assumed surprise and regret that anyone would be deceived.

Wild was himself, and he was one not easily taken in.

It was the off-hand way in which Wild, junior, had uttered the last sentence that baffled him.

Finding him silent, George put on a look of still greater consternation as he said, in a serious tone—

"Is it really possible, guv'nor, that you have lost those papers?"

"Don't I tell you I have?"

"I could hardly believe it! Perhaps you are mistaken, guv'nor? Look in your pockets again."

"It's no good; the papers are gone."

Wild, junior, followed this announcement with a long, low whistle, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

He saw that his father's suspicions were fast disappearing.

"And when you discovered your loss, guv'nor, do you really mean to say that you thought I had taken them?"

"I did. I could have staked my life of it."

"Then, if you had laid the wager, you would be looking rather queer just now, eh? You should be more careful, guv'nor. Why, what good would the papers be to me?"

"Oh! I don't know."

"Then you prove how absurd your suspicions were. But, never mind, guv'nor, I feel that I can forgive you for it. When you made that discovery, I don't wonder at your becoming unconscious of what you were about."

Jonathan was silent, and sank down on the other side of the bed.

"To think," he ejaculated, half-aloud and half to himself—"to think that I had those important papers securely in my grasp, after having taken such a deal of trouble to obtain possession of them, and then to lose them!"

"Damnably vexatious, guv'nor! But stop, now!"

"What is it?"

"When did you discover your loss?"

"A minute ago. I threw myself down, but could not rest or close my eyes. I then bethought myself of the papers, and resolved to become acquainted with their contents. I put my hand into my pocket, where I had placed them, but they were gone."

"How vexing! When did you feel them last?"

"When did I feel them last?"

"Yes."

Jonathan passed his hand over his bald head in an absent fashion.

He was trying to remember.

But he could not.

"Curse it!" he said, at length. "I put them in my pocket securely, as I thought."

"And you have not felt them since?"

"I cannot recollect doing so."

"Nor do I. It's not to be wondered at, when you consider how we were surprised, and what trouble we had to get off."

"A thousand curses!"

"It's no good cursing, guv'nor. But I think it's rather too bad of you to be so ready to accuse me. It's very disheartening to be wrongfully suspected. Now, you see, you put the papers into your pocket, and never thought to look or feel whether they were safe until after you had laid down, and then, when you found they had gone, you jumped up in a moment, and accused me of stealing them. It's too bad, d—n me if it isn't!"

Jonathan listened to this outburst of indignation, and forgot his suspicions.

"What shall I do, George?" he cried. "My position is now ten thousand times worse than before. If I have lost the packet, as I fear I have, it will be found—its contents will be examined, and then, farewell to the best scheme that the brain of man ever conceived!"

"It's damnably aggravating!" said George, "for I quite intended to have a pick off that bone myself! It is to be hoped that you lost the infernal papers while you were on the Thames, and that they have sunk to the bottom!"

"I must think, I must think," said the thief-taker, as he rose from his seat and went towards the door of the apartment. "Good night, George. I must have some sleep; I shall be able to think better then."

As he spoke, Jonathan left the room, closing the door behind him.

As it closed, George Wild's face gradually expanded into a grin of satisfaction.

CHAPTER CCC.

REVERTS PARTICULARLY TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF BLUESKIN IN WILD'S HOUSE.

WE imagine the reader will be easily able to conceive how great was the thief-taker's dismay and consternation upon discovering the loss of the papers.

It was rather strange that his first suspicions should be so correct.

Now, however, he was completely thrown off the track; for, by his cunning behaviour, George had succeeded in clearing himself.

Jonathan felt the need of sleep.

But, with his brain in such a whirl as it was at that moment—with his thoughts so terribly distracted as they were—how was he to hope for repose?

Nevertheless, he flung himself upon his bed, and tossed and tumbled about, until, at length, his body becoming thoroughly weary, he dropped off into an uneasy slumber. There we will leave him.

It is, we think, high time that we turned our attention to Blueskin, of whom, lately, only casual mention has been made.

He had the prudence to obey all Mr. Snoxall's injunctions, and found himself rapidly getting better.

But he was careful to conceal this as much as possible.

He was quite certain that, so soon as Jonathan found he was getting up his strength, he would be removed from the chamber he now occupied to some place of much greater strength and security.

His intentions were, then, simple enough.

He would do all he could to recover from his hurts as quickly as possible, but yet conceal his progress towards convalescence.

Then, when he felt his strength was equal to the task, he would endeavour to make his escape.

It was, however, a matter of great difficulty to deceive Mr. Snoxall with regard to his recovery.

But he feigned sickness as well as he could.

After the interview, which we have already described as taking place between him and Jonathan Wild, he remained for some time in deep thought.

It was not, however, that he hesitated about rejecting the proposal.

He simply tried to fathom Jonathan's policy.

In this manner he passed away the time until night came.

That night which Jonathan spent in Lord Donmull's house in Piccadilly.

As the different objects in the room began to grow confused and indistinct with the approaching darkness, he resolved not to delay any longer making an effort to escape.

He felt stronger and much better than he had done.

He had the prudence to lie still until Mr. Snoxall paid his last visit, which was generally just about nightfall. But it so happened that he was later than usual.

As he waited for him to come, Blueskin tossed and tumbled upon the bed and worked himself up into a fever of impatience.

At last Mr. Snoxall came.

"You have been exciting yourself," he said, the moment he saw his patient. "That is wrong; you must keep yourself quiet, or you will have a dangerous relapse."

To this Blueskin made no reply.

As soon, however, as Mr. Snoxall withdrew, he sat upright in bed, and listened.

He heard him descend the stairs with his usual deliberate tread.

After that all was still.

He waited five minutes longer.

Then he sprang out of bed.

The moment his feet touched the floor, and his body assumed an upright position, such a sudden accession of faintness came over him that he was scarcely able to save himself from falling heavily to the floor.

Probably nothing but the consciousness that if he did so the whole house would be aroused, and his scheme of escape defeated, would have enabled him to rally from it.

But he did rally.

He felt giddy and sick, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

By degrees, however, he recovered himself, and slowly began to attire himself.

All this time he was in profound darkness.

When he had put on his last article of apparel he felt much better.

Having accomplished so much as he had acted as a kind of stimulus upon him.

With a better heart he turned to a consideration of how he was to leave the chamber.

The door, he knew, was not only of great strength, but hampered on the outside with almost every imaginable style of fastening.

He turned away from it without a hope of doing any good in that direction, for he was also aware that a man kept watch outside both by day and night.

The window presented him with scarcely any better hopes.

It was small in size, strongly barred on the outside, and a considerable distance from the ground.

But that was the only other means by which egress could be had from the chamber.

To a sick man, whose body had been almost drained of blood, these looked like insurmountable obstacles.

But Blueskin did not think them such.

He opened the window easily enough, for it was not fastened except by a little button.

Indeed, every reliance seemed to be placed upon the iron bars without; for during his sickness the window had, by Mr. Snoxall's instructions, frequently been opened.

The gush of cool air that, on the present occasion, came through the iron bars, refreshed Blueskin exceedingly, and seemed to re-invigorate his whole frame.

He took hold of one of the horizontal iron bars and strove to shake it in its setting.

But the effort was altogether a vain one.

The bar did not move in the slightest perceptible degree.

Without any tools, how was a man in Blueskin's state to hope to remove them?

And when he had done so, how was he to escape?

There was but one means, and that was to stand upon the window-sill, take hold of the parapet, and draw himself up on to the roof.

But surely there must have been some traces of delirium about his brain, or he would surely never have contemplated the performance of so desperate a feat.

However, he felt in his pockets, for he was not without a hope that they had been left unsearched.

But they had been cleared of everything they contained, with the exception of one article, and that probably had been left because its size was so small, or because it was thought valueless.

It was nothing but a crooked piece of steel.

With this ineffective implement Blueskin hoped to effect a great deal.

He began, with great patience and perseverance, to pick out the mortise in which the end of one of the iron bars was imbedded.

It was a tedious operation.

Bit by bit, however, the hard mortar was dislodged, until at last he was able, by an exertion of the utmost strength he possessed, to get out one end.

A very great deal, he told himself, was now accomplished, and with renewed spirits he set himself to work.

Now that one end of the bar was cleared, he was able to work it slowly backwards and forwards, until at length he bent it back altogether.

It stood out at right angles to the wall.

It now occurred to him that, if he could pursue the same course with the other bars, they would very materially aid him in making his way on to the roof.

This thought was a fresh encouragement to him to proceed.

But from time to time a dizziness and faintness came over him, which but too truly told that he was overtaxing his strength.

Each time, however, that he experienced this sensation, he shook it off.

It returned, however, again and again, and with less interval on every occasion.

Still he continued at his labour.

At length the one end of the last bar was released, and bent back into the same position as its predecessors.

A series of rude steps were then presented, up which it was possible to climb.

But Blueskin was now terribly exhausted.

The perspiration poured off him in streams, and he drew his breath in short and fitful gasps.

Clouds of blood seemed floating before his eyes.

Still, rendered desperate by the prospect of liberty so temptingly laid out before him, he made one more effort to summon his fleeting breath and get upon the window-sill.

The first attempt he made was an utter failure.

The strength seemed to have wholly deserted his arms.

There was a terrible tightness about his heart when he made this discovery.

What should he do?

He tried to shake off the deadly lassitude which had seized upon him.

He made one more effort to mount the window-sill.

This time he succeeded.

Animated by this partial success, he tried to take the next step towards liberty.

But here our hero found his strength deserted him.

Again came over him that awful sensation of faintness and strengthlessness.

He swayed to and fro upon the window-sill like a drunken man.

He seemed in the most imminent danger of falling into the street.

He made feeble and ineffectual attempts to grasp at different objects.

Each time unsuccessfully.

His fingers were unable to make use of their prehensile qualities.

He uttered a gasping sob, and then, unconscious of everything, fell backwards on the floor of the room, his head coming into terrible contact with the boards.

Had that feeling seized him when he swayed in the other direction—that is, forwards instead of backwards—he must have fallen into the street.

No earthly power could have saved him.

The noise of his fall reached the ears of the man on guard outside.

He instantly raised an alarm, in accordance with the instructions he had received.

Quilt Arnold hurried upstairs; and, on the door being thrown open, Blueskin was found in the condition we have described.

At first they thought he was dead, for they were unable to discover any signs of vitality.

Mr. Snoxall was immediately sent for, and, when he arrived, he immediately set about recovering his patient, whom he found in a state of unconsciousness, not death.

But his condition was now rendered extremely critical by this relapse.

He was once more brought to the very brink of the grave.

The reader will, perhaps, remember that, on his return from Lord Donnnull's mansion in Piccadilly, which was on the evening succeeding these events, Jonathan had gone upstairs to inquire after his prisoner's condition.

He was met on the threshold of the room by the apothecary, who held up his finger enjoining silence.

Jonathan was surprised to learn that Blueskin was so much worse.

He was in hopes to find he had recovered sufficiently to warrant his being taken to the cells.

But, when he saw Blueskin extended on the bed, and looking for all the world like a corpse, he abandoned the idea.

Quilt Arnold had repaired to some extent the damage Blueskin had done, and Mr. Snoxall did not think of it to acquaint him with all the particulars of the affair just at present.

Then, as for Wild himself, he was fully occupied with his new project, so he did not pay so much attention as probably at another time he would have done.

On the day following the loss of the papers, however, Jonathan was made acquainted with the full particulars of Blueskin's attempt to escape.

This made him terribly uneasy.

If the papers had slipped through his fingers, he was determined that Blueskin should not do so.

Let the risk be what it might, he resolved to place him in some place of greater security; and, in spite of all Mr. Snoxall's remonstrances, Blueskin was forthwith carried to the cells.

The reader may be sure that Jonathan Wild took care that it should be the strongest of the lot.

He allowed him a plentiful supply of straw for a bed, but took good care to have his limbs so chained that he could only move very slightly.

It was in vain Mr. Snoxall exclaimed against this, and declared how injurious it was to the health of prisoner.

Jonathan turned a deaf ear to all.

He was intent only upon keeping him safe.

This there seemed every likelihood of his being able to do.

Even Blueskin, stronghearted and resolute as he was, lost all hope.

He was in the clutches of the thief-taker, and held so fast that it was impossible to get out.

But his chief anxiety was not so much for himself nor for the peril of his situation.

It was for Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, who, ignorant of his fate, must be suffering a thousand terrible apprehensions.

Mr. Snoxall still continued his attendance, and, though his case had seemed so desperate, Blueskin showed unequivocal signs of rapid recovery.

This intelligence was, of course, duly conveyed to the thief-taker by the apothecary.

CHAPTER CCCL.

JONATHAN WILD PAYS BLUESKIN A VISIT IN HIS CELL, AND MAKES A STARTLING PROPOSITION TO HIM.

HAD he not been so unlucky as to lose the packet of papers, Jonathan would have considered that at last he had succeeded in his nefarious schemes.

Blueskin was his prisoner, and, ere long, he was confident of capturing Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess.

The papers, however, had disappeared.

During the day which succeeded the night upon which he had lost them, Jonathan suffered an agony of apprehension.

He dreaded every moment to hear the intelligence that they had been found, and their contents made public.

Was such to be the case, there would, of course, be an end to his daring attempt to obtain possession of the Donnnull estates and title, for Jonathan had dared to covet that too, small as was his chance of success.

The day passed away, however, and the next night came, without any such unwelcome intelligence reaching his ears.

But even this, though it may sound strange to say so, was productive of discomfort and uneasiness of mind.

It was clear the papers had not been lost either in the lawyer's chambers, in the Temple-gardens, or on his way home after leaving the boat.

Had they been dropped in either of these places, he was quite confident they must have been found by some one.

And, when found, the character of the papers was of such a startling character as to insure their being made public.

But this was not so, or he would have heard something long ere this.

In this manner he was driven back to the suggestion of his son, who had hinted they might have been lost in the Thames.

But, somehow, Jonathan could not bring himself to think this.

Of all the places he had been in, this was the least likely for them to be lost.

To be sure, they might have fallen into the boat; but if so, they would have been found by the waterman.

As he pursued these reflections, Jonathan felt the suspicions he had at first entertained of his son having purloined them rapidly return, and with a stronger sense of conviction than before.

He was no stranger to the advantages which would accrue to his son, should he really have them in his possession.

He did not so much dread that he would use them against him, as he did that he would obtain a kind of mastery over him.

The more Jonathan pondered over it, the more likely it seemed.

"I will notice whether there is any alteration in his behaviour," he muttered; "whether he will treat me as though he thought I was in his power. If he does, then I shall know that he has the papers, and it will be no hard task to obtain possession of them again, and then I should be able to make him smoke for it!"

Having come to this resolution, Jonathan wisely made up his mind to abide the issue of events.

"I will see Blueskin," he exclaimed, after a few minutes' thought; "he must surely be by this time reduced to the greatest abjection! If so, it will be all the easier for me to succeed with him. But matters are now, I feel convinced, coming to a crisis, and I am determined to bring the matter to an end somehow or other!"

He rose from the chair upon which he had been sitting as he spoke, and, going to the cupboard by the side of the fireplace, produced a torch, of which he had a large bundle.

At one time, when he paid a visit to the prisoners in the cells, he had always taken a dark lantern with him.

But latterly he had found this did not give light sufficient to satisfy him.

This was owing to the impureness of the air in the cells, which did not permit the wick of the lamp to combust properly.

With the torch, however, he got on much better.

In a pure atmosphere they gave out a great glare of light, and though in the dungeons their lustre was much diminished, still they diffused sufficient light to enable him to see with distinctness about him.

Being thus provided, the thief-taker lighted the torch and proceeded to the dungeons.

His heavy tread awakened many dismal echoes in that subterraneous region.

They aroused Blueskin from a kind of half-dozed into which he had fallen.

He slowly and painfully raised himself up on one arm.

The heavy footstep paused outside the door of his dungeon.

He recognised the heavy step.

He knew it was the thief-taker, who was about to pay him a visit.

He nerved himself for the worst.

One by one the numerous heavy fastenings were undone.

The door was flung open.

Then there was a glare of light which, after the darkness of his dungeon, was so brilliant that Blueskin had to close his eyes.

He was unable to look upon it.

But anxiety to know what was going to take place would not allow him to keep them shut, and when he opened them, he blinked like some nocturnal animal disturbedly alight.

Dimly and imperfectly he saw the form of his persecutor.

Jonathan Wild, on this occasion, thought fit to assume what he considered a highly facetious manner.

He entered the cell with a jaunty step, and, going close up to Blueskin, held the torch within about a couple of inches of his face.

Blueskin shrunk back as far as he could, but that was only a short distance, for the chains effectually prevented him from moving far.

"You don't look well, my friend," said Wild, with mock joviality in his tones, and which grated terribly upon the ears of the prisoner, who made no reply.

"But you will soon be better, I know," continued Wild. "Just wait a moment, I have got something I want to say to you."

"If it is to repeat the proposal you made to me the other day, you may as well save yourself the trouble. You can take my answer now."

Jonathan Wild affected not to hear this speech, but busied himself in sticking the torch in an iron ring that was fastened in the wall.

In this position it diffused a light over the limited area of the cell.

Going to one corner of it, Jonathan produced what Blueskin did not know was there.

It was a small, three-legged stool.

But he might well be in ignorance of its presence, for the darkness of the cell was profound.

Jonathan brought this to about the centre of the dungeon.

Then, placing it there, he sat himself down upon it.

For a moment or two he looked at his prisoner in silence.

Blueskin presented but a sorry spectacle.

It grieves us to have to describe our old friend in such a plight.

His head was bandaged up, and a great deal of his hair cut away.

This gave him an unnatural and terrible appearance.

His face was white and bloodless.

His eyes dull and sunken.

His cheeks forming two great hollows, leaving the jaws distinctly visible.

His whole form was wasted and emaciated.

To use a common expression, he was but the shadow of his former self.

Then his clothes were torn, and ragged, and soaked with blood from top to bottom.

Indeed, it would not be possible for the imagination to picture a more wretched-looking object than Blueskin now was.

Jack Sheppard would scarcely have known him.

He was very weak, and the fetters he had on weighed him down, but still he managed to find strength enough to raise himself up on one arm and look into the countenance of thief-taker, where, however, there was neither pity nor compassion visible.

On the contrary, he seemed to rejoice at the terrible appearance which Blueskin now presented, for his face was distorted into a grin of hideous derision.

He repeated his former speech in the same disagreeable tones.

"You don't look well, my friend, and I am sadly afraid that the atmosphere of this cell will not agree with you; but I suppose you don't mind that, as you are here of your own free will."

To this taunting speech Blueskin returned no reply, but still fixed his eyes upon the countenance of his tormentor.

"Oh! you won't speak. Well, never mind, I suppose you mean that I am to take your silence for consent. Well, it seems strange that anyone should lie here in a place of this sort from choice. But strange things happen every day."

"Why do you mock me, Jonathan Wild?"

"Oh! you have found your tongue at last, have you? I am glad to hear it. Let's hear you talk a bit."

"Jonathan Wild!"

"What?"

"I am at a loss to think what can have brought you to this cell. Surely you have some better occupation than to come here and jeer and taunt me while I am powerless to resent your insults!"

"Ha! ha!"

"That laugh is unmeaning. Jonathan Wild, you have got to deal with one who knows you as well as yourself; and therefore all these little artifices, in which you so delight, although they might have an effect upon some, are quite powerless upon me."

"I see, my friend, you are a great deal better than I thought you were, and I rejoice in such a circumstance. I am prepared for you this time, however. It's no good your trying to get out of this place."

And Jonathan glanced round at the stone walls of the cell triumphantly, as though he would defy anyone to break through them.

Blueskin did not think proper to reply in any way to this speech or this look.

Wild continued.

But he spoke in a different tone, and with a different manner.

"Look here, Blueskin," he said; "you told me just now that you knew me. Well, I daresay you do. You have had, in past time, plenty of opportunities of studying my character. So much the better if you do know me, Blueskin. So much the better. We shall come to an understanding with each other all the sooner."

"We shall come to no understanding whatever."

"You think so."

"I do."

"Then I differ from you. Listen."

"I am compelled to do so, willingly or unwillingly."

"As you remark, you are compelled to listen to me. Now, you boast that you know me. I do not deny it; but, if so, you must also possess this one piece of knowledge—when I say a thing I always keep my word!"

But Blueskin still remained silent.

"Why don't you speak?" at length roared the thief-taker.

"What must I say?"

"Answer me."

"What?"

"Do I or do I not keep my word?"

"You make a boast that you do."

"And do I not?"

"When you are able, no doubt."

"But I am able."

Blueskin was again silent.

"You think to provoke me by maintaining this silence."

"I have nothing to talk about."

"Why do you not answer me?"

"I do."

"Come, come, Blueskin, we shall never get on like this. I want to have a few minutes' chat with you. Why should we be foes, like we lately have been? You see it has resulted in no good to yourself."

"If you are going to repeat your former proposal, you may as well spare your trouble. My mind remains unaltered. My resolve is the same."

"Fair and softly—fair and softly. I only submitted one side of the question. You must look at it in two lights."

"There is no necessity."

"But I say there is."

"How so?"

"My proposal to you was this. You are my prisoner—helplessly my prisoner. Now, upon certain conditions, I am willing, not only to set you at liberty, but also to restore you to that position which you but recently occupied in my household. There you were in comfort and in safety."

Blueskin turned over on his straw impatiently.

Jonathan continued.

"The simple conditions which I mentioned were, that you should discover to me the whereabouts of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Besz, and aid me in the designs which I have formed against them."

"And do you think, Jonathan Wild," exclaimed Blueskin, in furious tones, "do you think that I am such a monstrous villain as to doom my comrade to an ignominious death, and be instrumental in depriving a poor persecuted girl of her just inheritance? No, Jonathan Wild. Ten thousand times no!"



[JONATHAN WILD'S SON SECRETING THE LORD DONMULL'S PAPERS.]

CHAPTER CCCII.

JONATHAN WILD THREATENS BLUESKIN WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS REFUSAL.

BLUESKIN pronounced these words with such tremendous energy that he made the vaulted dungeon ring again, and Jonathan Wild shrank back with something like surprise visible upon his countenance.

But, as soon as he had spoken, the factitious vigour with which he had been inspired suddenly left him, and Blueskin fell back upon the straw as though dead.

Jonathan did not move hand or foot; and, his first surprise over, he sat calmly upon his stool looking at him.

Blueskin's swoon was only a partial one, and he soon recovered himself from the effects of it.

As soon as he felt himself able, he raised himself again, and, looking his tormenter in the face, said, with as much calmness as he could assume—

"Jonathan Wild, cease to torment me upon this theme. You know my determination, and I shall not depart from it. My mind is firmly made up."

"Oh! it is, is it?" said Wild, mocking the tone of voice in which he spoke.

"It is."

"Very well, then; that will do."

"I rejoice to hear you say so, and I hope you will be good enough to leave me."

"Oh! dear no; we can't part yet, my friend. I have not said all I intended to say to you, and I can't go away till I have. Just listen."

"I am compelled to do so."

"So you said before, and uncommonly true the remark is. Now pay attention, as you must be aware there are two sides to every question."

"If there were a thousand sides to your proposal, my determination would still remain unaltered."

"Oh! indeed. Well, now, I differ from you there entirely. When I made you the proposition, I told you what advantages would accrue to you if you accepted it."

"Advantages?"

"Yes; but I did not tell you what would be the consequences of your refusal."

"Nor need you."

"So you think, perhaps; but I will tell you just the same."

And, as he spoke, Jonathan Wild assumed what he considered to be a very striking and highly effective attitude.

Leaning forward, he placed one elbow on his knee, and supported his head with one hand.

The other hand he allowed to rest in a negligent sort of manner upon his other knee.

In this position he leered into Blueskin's countenance, as he said—

"Blueskin, my friend—for such, when I think about the past, I cannot help calling you—Blueskin, my friend, you made a very egregious mistake when you thought proper to leave me and link yourself with my enemies. You have done no good since; whereas, if you had been content to remain with me, all would have gone on as well as before."

"Until I ceased to be of service to you."

"Now, Blueskin, my dear friend, don't talk like that. But I daresay the pain of your wound has an irritating effect upon your temper. I am afraid, too, that it confuses your mind, and disables you from seeing things as clearly as you ought to do."

"I understand sufficient."

"A delusion—a delusion. Now, I will tell you what I will do; for, really, if you will believe me, I should like to put an end to the dissensions between us."

"You can easily do so."

"How?"

"Cease to pursue Jack Sheppard and myself like you do, and no longer persecute the poor heiress."

"Ha! ha! An easy way, truly. No—no, my friend; the thing must be done in a different way to that—in an entirely different way. But this is what I shall have to do: I shall have to show you your exact position, which I am sure, by your behaviour, you cannot comprehend."

"There you are in error, Jonathan Wild."

"No, it is you who are in error, as I will quickly prove, if you will allow me the opportunity."

"I am not in a position to interfere with or prevent what you may intend to do."

"Oh! you acknowledge that, do you? Then, let me tell you that is an important admission—such a one as, candidly speaking, I did not think you would make. However, it is highly satisfactory for me to find that your intellects are not quite in such a state of confusion as I thought they were."

Blueskin moved uneasily.

Jonathan's manner galled him, as well as the fact that he was powerless to escape from being thus tormented.

Wild continued.

"Just have a look at the past. You know my way of carrying on business. In fact, you are acquainted with a great many of my secrets—I may say all, so far as trade is concerned. We got on well together. I found I could trust you and depend upon you, just as well as I could depend upon myself. I was liberal to you, and you were content. Thus, all went well, and to the mutual advantage of all persons. Now, Blueskin, answer me this, and answer me truly: have you ever been so comfortable since you quitted my employ, as you were before you did so?"

"Not bodily; for, in consequence of your inveterate hostility, I have had much to suffer; but then, I have had the consolation of an approving conscience."

"Bah! bah! bah!"

"You do not know what that is, Jonathan Wild, and, in all probability, you never will. But I do, and it has encouraged me to endure all the misery you have inflicted upon me."

"Now, Blueskin," said Wild, in an affected deprecatory manner, "do, for goodness' sake, talk sense. If you will only do so, I can get along; but when you talk about such d—d nonsense as approving conscience, you turn me sick. Listen."

"To what?"

"To what I was saying when you flew off at a tangent. You admitted, however, that you had never been comfortable since you set yourself up in opposition to me."

"The opposition came from you, not from us. We would willingly have let you alone, but you would not allow us to do so."

"But you forget, Blueskin, that you interfered with my plans—that, in fact, you interrupted my choicest scheme."

"That of robbing an unprotected girl of the wealth and title which should belong to her. A feat well worthy of you, truly!"

"No matter; you interfered, and you perceive the consequences. You have gained nothing by your opposition; on the contrary, you have lost everything. There was the matter of Jack Sheppard. Curse the fellow! It is he who has caused all this trouble, and I hate him for it! You brought him to me, as I believe, thinking that he would serve me; but, instead of that, how has he behaved? and then, when he rebelled, you sided with him."

"And should do so again under the same circumstances."

"Then I lament your want of sense."

"You may do so."

"I do. But enough of that. I say you joined him, and set yourself up against me. How foolish must such a proceeding be upon your part! As though you two could contend with any amount of success against anyone so powerful as I am!"

"You overrate yourself."

"Not so; events will prove that I do not. As yet, who has been best off in the contest?"

"You have not succeeded."

"But I can easily do so. At any rate, I have you in my power, so wholly that it is impossible for you to be extricated from it. I can do with you just as I please. I could slay you at this moment, if it answered my purpose to do so, and you would not be able to so much as raise your arm to ward off the fatal blow!"

"And why do you not strike it?"

"For reasons of my own, which, if you thought proper, you could easily become acquainted with."

"What are they?"

"All in good time. You are not prepared to hear them yet. Do you admit that you are wholly and utterly in my power?"

"I cannot deny it."

"Well, then, if such is the case, it appears I am in a position to dictate terms to you."

"Jonathan Wild," said Blueskin, "you are only beating about the bush. Whether it is with the intention of stultifying my intellects or not I know not, but your conversation comes to just the same point as before. You would offer me my freedom upon conditions, that I re-enter your service, and deliver Edgworth Bess and Jack Sheppard into your hands, for you to do with them as you may think fit."

Jonathan clapped his hands.

"Bravo, Blueskin!" he said. "Your brain is not half so muddled as I thought it was. You comprehend your position very well indeed."

"And am I right with regard to the proposal you would make me?"

"Perfectly right."

"Then, Jonathan Wild, I repeat what I said a short time ago. My answer is no; if necessary, a thousand times no!"

"Oh! indeed. You refuse?"

"Most certainly."

"Stop a moment. You have not taken all things into consideration. Believe me, the proposal is made out of the good feeling I have for you."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"You laugh."

"Yes, and so would anyone else who heard Jonathan Wild talk about having good feeling for anyone."

The thief-taker scowled.

"Blueskin," he said, "I am willing to spare your life if you are willing to have your life spared. Do you think that, if you refuse to assist me in capturing Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, I should fail to do so? No! I merely mention that as a condition of your freedom, in order that I may be assured of your good faith. After that I should have no doubts, and once more take you into my confidence, as I did of old. I feel the want of you, or, at any rate, of some person upon whom I could rely."

"There is your son."

"I like him not! I like him not!"

Jonathan frowned darkly as he spoke.

Any allusion to his son always disturbed him, and on the present occasion his mind was tortured with the suspicions, which he could not dissipate, respecting the loss of the important packet of papers.

Blueskin noted the effect his words had upon him.

"Join me!" said Wild, chasing away all thoughts of his son; "join me! I promise you shall have no occasion to repent of having done so. Join me, I say! It will be the best for both of us."

"That I dispute."

"When you were at my right hand, I always succeeded in what I undertook, and never met with the vexatious disappointments which lately I have so frequently experienced; and now I cannot help thinking that you were in some mysterious way connected with my successes."

"Jonathan Wild!" said Blueskin; "hear me, once for all. It is impossible for me to join you again, or for us ever to assume our former position with respect to each other. Circumstances have made us foes, and such we must continue."

"Indeed!" said Wild; "then do you know what I shall do? You have confessed yourself in my power; and well you know that you are. You cannot save these two persons, and you cannot save yourself, unless you choose to subscribe to my conditions. Let me see; what is to-day? Oh! Saturday. Very good; that will do capitally. The sessions come on on Wednesday; you will be brought up; case against you; tried; found guilty, of course; sentence of death in due form; and you will be hanged on Monday morning!"

"Jonathan Wild!"

"What?"

"You have been talking a great deal about my being in your power; do you forget that you are in mine?"

Jonathan started.

But he quickly recovered his self-possession.

"In what way am I in your power?"

"Do you forget with what secrets of yours I am acquainted? When I am brought up for trial I will make a full confession of all your villainies!"

"Bah! bah! bah!"

"You may affect to despise me, but you will find I shall be as good as my word."

"So you may be! so you may be, and welcome! Tell all you like—it will make no difference to me. I am in remarkably good odour with the authorities just at present, and it does not matter what you say—all will be put down to the ravings of malice. If you think that gives you any power over me, you are deceived."

"Well, we shall see."

"So we shall, if we live long enough; but the term of your existence is rapidly drawing to a close, unless you choose to reverse your late determination; and I hardly think you will be fool enough to adhere to it."

"I shall adhere to it. Jonathan Wild, I defy you! Do your worst!"

"I shall keep my word. However, I am willing to give you one more chance for escape. I will come and see you again on Monday. Until then, you can occupy yourself in reflecting over your position; you will have nothing else to do."

"You may as well take your answer now."

"I do; but still, for all that, I shall allow you an opportunity of altering your mind."

"You need not."

"Oh! you don't know."

"I do."

"So you may think. You can either tell me where I can find Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess or not, just as you please. But, if you do not tell me, I cannot long remain ignorant of their whereabouts; and then, when I have them in my hands, you will no longer have an opportunity of proving your good faith."

"Nor do I require one."

"But I do."

"Jonathan Wild, I wish you would believe me when I say that all this talk is idle. You see, after our long interview, things remain just as they were upon the former occasion, and it will be the same always."

"Then you shall swing!" said Jonathan, his anger at length getting the better of him; and, starting up from the stool upon which he sat, as he spoke—"you shall swing! I would fain have spared you that ignominious

fate, if I could; but, since you are resolved upon it, why, you shall swing. It will be the easiest matter in the world for me to get up a case against you and have you convicted—then all will be over."

"So you fondly imagine, no doubt."

"I don't imagine; I am certain. Farewell! I leave you yet a chance to change your determination. There is time. I repeat, you can have from now until Monday morning to reflect."

As he spoke these words, the thief-taker stalked angrily from the cell, taking the torch, and carefully locking the door after him.

He was much annoyed at the want of success which had attended all the efforts he had made.

He had spared no trouble—he had used every argument his imagination could suggest—but all to no purpose; the resolution of the prisoner remained unshaken. Still he scarcely despaired.

He knew well how powerful an instinct was the desire of life, and he fancied that, even in the eleventh hour, Blueskin would give way.

How far he was sincere in his proposals, and what would have been the result if Blueskin had consented to them, we leave the reader to judge.

He must have obtained a tolerable insight into his character by this time, if possessed of any penetration at all; and he need only ask himself the question whether, if he was in Blueskin's place, he would feel inclined to put any faith in his promises.

Whether he succeeded or not on the Monday morning, time alone can determine.

We can only patiently await the progress of events.

For the present, however, we must leave Jonathan Wild to mature his schemes and meditate fresh villainies, while we devote our attention to the proceedings of Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, of whom we have for so long lost sight.

CHAPTER CCCIII.

RELATES THE FORTUNES AND ADVENTURES OF JACK SHEPPARD AND EDGWORTH BESS UPON THEIR ARRIVAL IN LONDON.

WHEN Jack Sheppard, after committing the robbery in the lane, stopped the stage-coach, he almost lifted Edgworth Bess into it.

The events took place with so much rapidity that the poor girl had no time to make even an attempt at resistance, and her senses, too, were so distracted that she scarcely knew what she was about.

She was, indeed, quite passive in Jack's hands.

Upon finding herself in the inside of the coach, she mechanically sat down upon the vacant seat that was nearest to her; and she had scarcely done so before the vehicle was set in motion again.

Then she began to recollect herself somewhat.

She leant back in her seat, and clasped her hands over her eyes—then burst into a passionate flood of tears.

Those tears almost broke Jack Sheppard's heart; he could endure, he thought, any other sight than that of seeing her weeping, and that unmanned him completely.

There were two other persons inside the coach, and, as they had nothing else better to do, they looked at the two new comers with great curiosity, though the dim light which hung from the roof of the coach did not permit them to see very distinctly.

But, beyond this regard of inquisitive curiosity, they did not go.

They did not ask what was the cause of her grief, or inquire whether it was in their power to do anything to assuage it.

For this, however, Jack was thankful.

He felt that any interference would exasperate him to such a degree that he should cease to be master of his actions.

So it was, perhaps, fortunate for all parties that no more notice was taken.

Jack did not attempt to soothe Edgworth Bess in any way.

It was not that he felt unwilling to do so, but because he was at a loss to think what he could say or do that would tend towards it.

So he was silent.

The coach rolled on, at what was then considered the wonderful rate of ten or twelve miles an hour.

It was rather an imprudent thing for Jack to make this journey in so public a manner, but he almost felt careless of all consequences.

For one thing, he calculated upon arriving in London at an hour when very few persons would be abroad.

That was the hour just before daybreak.

And so he was forced to remain silent, and occupy himself with his own thoughts.

This was an occupation which did not promise to be a very pleasing one.

He looked at his fellow-travellers, but, their curiosity being now exhausted, they had ceased to trouble any further about them.

They were both hard-featured looking men, and, if their countenances were any index to their dispositions, it was certain they possessed little sympathy, and still less commiseration, for the sufferings of others who might not be so well off as themselves.

It was in this way, then, that the journey was performed.

It was not a long one, for Jack had not succeeded in getting very far from London.

As he expected, the coach pulled up in the Borough, just a little before dawn.

Some faint signs of the approaching day might have been distinguished by a close observer, but that was all.

Jack alighted, and paid the fare for himself and his companion.

This done, he took hold of her arm and led her unresistingly away.

But only for a few paces.

As soon as the inn before which the coach had stopped was fairly out of sight, Edgworth Bess stopped, and released herself from the slight hold which Jack held upon her arm.

Then she recoiled a few paces.

Jack observed this with the greatest surprise.

But, before he could utter a word, she spoke.

He made no attempt to interrupt her.

He felt constrained to listen.

"Jack," she said, in a voice choked with sobs, "Jack, what booty did you take from that man in the lane?"

Jack stammered and hesitated.

"Let it be what it will, you must restore it to its owner. Money, got in the way you obtained that, will be a curse to us instead of a blessing. I say again, you must restore it; and in that way make the only reparation you can for the crime you have committed.

"Impossible."

"No—no. It is not impossible."

"It is—believe me, it is. The mischief is done, and cannot be repaired. What, think you, would be the result of returning these things? I should be laughed at and captured."

"No, not captured."

"Yes, I should. They would certainly give me into custody."

"Then, Jack, there is one other thing you must do."

"What is it?"

"Nay, do not come any closer. Since, by your own showing it is impossible for you to restore these things, you must fling them away."

"Fling them away?"

"Yes; and if you really have that regard for me which you profess to have, you will not hesitate a single moment to do as I desire. Fling those things away."

"And starve?"

"Yes, and starve. It will be better that we should do that than procure food by such means. It will be the means of getting us into still further trouble. Take my advice, and fling them all away."

"The money, too?" asked Jack.

"Yes, every farthing of it, for it will never do us any good, but bring us into fresh difficulties and dangers. Oh! Jack, how could you have committed such an act?"

Tears checked further utterance.

Jack endeavoured to draw closer to her, but she shrunk from him and avoided him.

He was as much pained as surprised at this behaviour.

He could not understand it.

"I acted for the best," he said, apologetically; "or as I thought for the best. But, now that the mischief is

done, do not ask me to fling the money away. That would be madness, situated as we now are."

"You refuse, then?"

"I do not exactly refuse," said Jack, hesitatingly, "but—"

"Oh! Jack, do not cause me to alter my good opinion of you. Be guided by me, and, take my word for it, it will be best. Fling all that money away which you have obtained by such dishonest means, and try to obtain some more in a better manner."

"You know not what you ask," said Jack. "If I throw this money away what is to become of us?"

"We must trust in Providence."

"If we do, we shall indeed have a frail dependence."

"Jack!"

"I repeat again, we shall have a frail dependence. I have no faith in this same Providence which people prate so much about. If it had any regard for innocence and suffering it would not have permitted you to remain so long in the condition you are."

"Oh! Jack—Jack! Do not speak like that—pray do not. If you do, you will break my heart—indeed you will."

"You will break mine if you continue to sob and weep like you do now. Cheer up! Believe me, all will yet be well."

"It will be well if you will fling away that money. Oh! do not hesitate any longer. In London money can be procured by honest and honourable means. If you cannot obtain it, I will try to do so."

"You speak in ignorance of the world."

"I may do. But I speak that which is right, and you cannot deny it. Fling that money away, I pray you."

"But Blueskin," urged Jack. "Think of him. He is, doubtless, a prisoner in the power of the villain Wild. The gold you ask me to cast away would, perhaps, procure his freedom. Do you not wish that object to be attained?"

"I do. Heaven knows I do. But you must accomplish it by some other means than those."

Jack was silent.

He was unwilling to refuse anything which his companion asked, but this last request seemed to him to be quite out of the bounds of reason.

He hesitated.

"Oh! Jack," continued Edgworth Bess, "if you only knew the anguish I suffered while we were in that coach. But, while I suffered, I reflected, and came to a resolution."

"What was it?"

"I resolved to urge this upon you, even as I have done, and try whether I could not persuade you to act in accordance with my wishes, and then, in the event of your refusing—"

"What?—oh! what?"

"I thought you might refuse, though I hoped and trusted that you would not. Still, if you did—"

A fresh gush of tears prevented her from announcing her resolution.

Jack's anxiety was extreme.

"If you did refuse, Jack," she said at length, recovering from her emotion with a great effort—"if you did refuse, I should part from you."

"Part from me?"

"Yes. You have the choice of two alternatives. You must either cast away that ill-gotten money or cast away me. Now, which will you do?"

"Oh! Bess; you torture me to madness. Do, I pray you, listen."

"Forbear to use any arguments. No matter how good you might consider them—they would be powerless with me; they would not induce me to alter my determination."

"But one word!"

"Not even one! No, Jack; you must tell me at once which you will do. Can it be possible that you hesitate?"

"I cannot believe that you are in earnest; or, if you are at the present moment, I think, ere long, you will repent, and wish that—"

"Never, never! Do not think such a thing as that for a single moment."

"I wish, dearest, that you would come nearer to me, that you would allow me to persuade"—

"You cannot persuade me! No, Jack; let us cease this dispute at once. Either you cast away that money, or we part, and henceforth our paths will lie in opposite directions."

Jack was torn with conflicting emotions.

He was willing to do as his companion asked him, but he was unable to see the policy of it. He asked himself the pertinent question of what were they to do in the event of consenting to part with the money?

Bess observed the conflict that was going on in his mind, and was silent.

At length she spoke.

"Have you decided?" she asked.

"I cannot decide without you listen to what I have to urge upon you."

"Farewell, then. Farewell. We must part."

She sobbed bitterly.

"No—no! we must not part!" said Jack, springing forward, and endeavouring to catch hold of her apparel.

But she eluded him, and increased the distance that already existed between them, and continued to retreat as Jack advanced.

He paused, for he felt that no good could be accomplished in that way.

"Oh! Bess," he cried, "do not present me to such a terrible alternative. Without this money we shall perish."

"And, if you retain it, we shall part."

"No—no."

"But I say yes. My determination, so far from being altered, is strengthened. You cannot shake it. Jack, must we part?"

"No—no; ten thousand times no."

"Then cast away the money."

"Oh! do not press this point; pray do not. Make some kind of compromise."

"No—no; none. I can, however, see that you, like me, have come to a determination. Well, I am sorry. I trust you will not abide by it."

"What do you mean?"

"I see that you are resolved to keep the money."

"No—no."

"Cast it away, then."

"No—no."

"I feared this would be the result. Farewell! Jack; farewell! We must part. One word before I go. Will you cast away that money?"

"Nay, I"—

"Enough—enough; say no more. I shall urge this matter no further. You have decided. Farewell!"

No words could possibly express the anguished tone with which these words were uttered.

No sooner had she spoken them, than she turned round and glided away into the semi-darkness like a shadow.

She vanished immediately.

For a moment, at least, Jack Sheppard was so petrified with astonishment that he was unable to move hand or foot.

But, when the power of volition was restored to him, he uttered a loud cry, and darted off in the direction which Edgworth Bess had taken.

But the turnings about that spot were perplexingly numerous, and no trace of her could be seen.

Scarcely daring to believe in the reality of what had just taken place, Jack Sheppard cried aloud—

"Bess, darling—Bess, darling! come back to me. Oh! pray come back to me. Come back, and I will no longer hesitate to consent to your wishes; but come back, I pray you! Answer me! Speak one little word to let me know where you have concealed yourself! We cannot part thus; it is impossible! Bess—Bess! Answer me! Come back!"

Jack ceased.

The violence or his emotion overcame him.

He could no longer give utterance to his supplicatory words.

He had raised his voice until it became a loud shout.

It rang with a startling effect through the silent and deserted streets.

But no reply came, save the wailing echo of his own words.

Distracted and maddened, Jack rushed frantically down the turning opposite to where he stood, and which he fancied his companion must have taken.

He continued his cries as he sped along it, to the surprise of those persons who happened, at that early hour, to be abroad.

At length the end of the street was gained, and numerous others spread out before him, leading in every conceivable direction.

He paused, and, with the hopelessness of despair, renewed his cries.

But all in vain.

They met with no response.

His decision came too late.

Had she melted in the misty morning air, Edgworth Bess could not have disappeared more suddenly and completely than she had done.

Stupefied and bewildered with grief and astonishment, Jack Sheppard once more looked around him.

He found himself surrounded by a throng of curious, eager persons, each of whom stretched their heads forward to see and hear what was taking place.

When he perceived this, Jack shrank back from the public observation he had drawn upon himself, and, with his heart almost bursting with grief, and his eyes blinded by tears which he could not repress, he rushed along the empty thoroughfares.

But he no longer called upon Edgworth Bess, and implored her to return.

His voice refused him.

His throat was swollen, and, had his life depended upon it, he could not have articulated a single word.

At length, breathless and exhausted, he sank down upon some stone steps that led up to some edifice.

What he did not look to see.

His strength was quite spent.

He could go no further.

He buried his face in his hands, and groaned.

Tears, too, the first he had shed for many a long day, forced their way through his fingers, and trickled down on to the steps.

He groaned heavily.

All other evils and calamities were now forgotten.

He could remember nothing, and think of nothing, but the terrible loss he had sustained.

By degrees, however, his grief abated in its violence, and then, becoming conscious of some slight sound near him, he looked up, and again found himself surrounded by a curious crowd of people, who all wondered what was the cause of his grief.

No sooner did Jack make this discovery than he started to his feet.

The people involuntarily made way for him.

Jack darted through their ranks in a moment, and fled.

Such despair and grief as he now felt, he had never before experienced.

He had lost Edgworth Bess, and entirely through his own fault.

This knowledge inflicted fresh poignancy.

Where to look for her now he knew not.

He had not yet sufficiently recovered the use of his faculties to be able to think with any degree of calmness upon the subject.

He only exhausted himself by rushing in all directions, without pursuing any method.

In this way it happened that he frequently went over the same ground twice.

At length, upon looking around him, he saw he had again reached the spot where their brief conversation had taken place.

He knew it again in a moment.

Then he grew calmer.

The tumult of his mind gradually subsided.

He looked around him.

It was now broad daylight, and that spot which, a few hours before, had been completely deserted, was now filled with people.

CHAPTER CCCIV.

JACK SHEPPARD RESOLVES UPON ONCE MORE MAKING HIS WAY INTO WILD'S HOUSE, AND ATTEMPTING THE RESCUE OF BLUESKIN.

BUT, although Jack continued thus to look around him, he was unable to see anything that would serve as a clue to the whereabouts of the poor heiress.

He was filled with dread on her account, not so much in

consequence of the danger a friendless, penniless, and unprotected girl must necessarily run in London, but because he had little doubt that, ere long, she must fall an easy prey into the clutches of her implacable enemies.

This almost drove him to madness, because he had no one he could accuse of driving her into this great danger but himself.

She was gone—utterly and completely gone.

It seemed at first like a dream, but its reality soon pressed itself upon him.

In a more systematic and logical manner than he had adopted hitherto, he recommenced his search.

In spite of the danger he brought upon himself by so doing, he inquired after his missing companion of every person he met.

But no one could give him any intelligence.

He inquired at every house in every street contiguous to the one in which she had disappeared, and still with the same disappointing result.

No one had seen her.

No one knew anything about her.

At length, after many hours of unsuccessful search, he crawled into a public-house, and, thoroughly wearied, he sank down upon a seat, and called for refreshment.

His position now, terrible as it was before, seemed ten times worse.

Indeed, in comparison, it sunk into insignificance.

Where Blueskin was, or what was his fate, he was equally ignorant as he was of the situation of Edgworth Bess.

His grief now had almost passed away, and was succeeded by a deep and hopeless despair.

He felt almost as though he could give himself up to his foes, and no longer continue his desperate fight against the force of fate.

In this frame of mind he remained for a long time, but at length hope slowly returned to his heart.

He resolved, if possible, to find Blueskin.

With this intent he rose and left the public-house.

Upon going out into the streets again he found it was quite dark, and that night had fairly come.

A cool wind swept past, and he felt grateful for it.

It cooled the fever of his brain, for his head and face were hot and flushed.

Jack, almost without considering upon the subject, directed his steps towards Newgate-street.

The impression that Blueskin had fallen into the hands of Jonathan Wild had taken hold of his mind with the full force of conviction.

He knew the character of the thief-taker too well to think that Blueskin's life was in any immediate danger.

In pursuing his refined system of revenge, he would consign him to the gallows, and that was a work of time.

The distance to Newgate-street was not great, and Jack soon arrived there.

The bustle of the day had subsided, and the streets were beginning to wear an empty look.

A slight rain that was falling tended, too, to clear the streets somewhat earlier than usual.

Jack passed the huge, gloomy prison of Newgate, and looked up at its black and dismal walls with a shudder.

He did not linger near it, however, but turned the corner into Newgate-street, where the residence of the thief-taker was situated.

It was here that he imagined Blueskin was most likely to be found.

Upon arriving opposite the ruinous structure, he crossed over on to the other side of the street, and looked up at it.

From none of the windows came the feeblest gleam of light.

Whether Blueskin was there or not, Jack had no means of telling.

What would he not have given for the possession of some full and definite information?

It was on this night that Jonathan and his son conducted their search in Lord Donnull's mansion in Piccadilly.

Both were from home, and remained so for many hours.

It was on that night, and about the same hour that Jack stood looking up at the thief-taker's dismal edifice, that Blueskin made his abortive attempt to escape.

Oh! if Jack had only known that!

How easily would he have made his way to that window, and assisted his comrade out on to the roof and into some place of safety.

He saw, indeed, the window open, and he saw the dark form appear at it, but the obscurity and distance were both too great for him to distinguish what it was.

Indeed, he dreaded that it was one of his foes; and, fearful of being seen, he drew back still further into the shadow of the houses close to which he stood.

It was in vain that Jack perplexed his brain and taxed his inventive powers to discover some means by which he could ascertain whether Blueskin was really a prisoner or not.

The only course he could think of, was by making his way, by some means or other, into the house, and ascertaining whether he was really there or not.

But the risk of such a course of action as this was so great that Jack shrunk from encountering it.

Should he unfortunately be taken prisoner at that juncture, their position would be terrible indeed.

That move, then, must be abandoned.

And so Jack stood irresolute, when, if he could only have known what was taking place within, he could have rendered important service.

In the contemplation of the probable situation of Blueskin and Edgworth Bess, he totally forgot his own danger.

He did not remember that an accurate description of himself had been extensively circulated, and that a large reward would be paid for his apprehension and lodgment in any of the city prisons.

And yet there he stood, calmly enough, within twenty paces of the outer wall of Newgate.

A thousand half-formed schemes by which he could accomplish his designs flitted through his brain, but none of them was clever enough for elaboration.

Something occurred to make them all impracticable.

And so, in this state of irresolution, he remained idle when he ought to have been actively at work.

It is more than probable that the sudden disappearance of Edgworth Bess was a great obstruction to his inventive powers, which, in ordinary circumstances, were by no means to be despised.

Now, however, his mind was divided between two objects, instead of being concentrated upon one.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in so difficult a matter he should be at fault.

It was in vain he tried to banish all recollection of the poor heiress; but he could not—the recollection of her loss, and his terrible uncertainty as to where she now was, perpetually intruded themselves.

In this fruitless manner the whole night was spent.

To be sure, he did not stand all the while upon the spot, but he hovered round about the thief-taker's residence, keeping careful guard.

But he was not rewarded for his trouble in any way.

Dawn at last approached, and then, fearful that if he remained there any longer he should be discovered and captured, he slunk away.

Besides which, he was weary in body and sick at heart.

He felt as though it would be a comfort to lie down and die.

Hungry, cold, and wretched, then, he crept away from Wild's house, with the intention of finding some place where he could shelter himself and recuperate his exhausted energies.

Had he but stayed a few minutes longer than he did, he would have seen Quilt Arnold emerge and return with Mr. Snuxall, the apothecary, whom he called in to attend to Blueskin on a discovery of him in his helpless condition.

Jack did not see this, but, going down a few narrow thoroughfares, found himself in the street called Little Britain.

Here there was a coffee-house, which he entered.

He called first for some refreshment, which the sinking of his system required him to take, and then asked for a bed.

Entering a wretched room at the top of the house, he threw himself, dressed just as he was, upon a still more wretched bed.

He closed his eyes, and endeavoured to woo sleep, but sleep came not.

He tossed over and over, tormented and distracted with his thoughts.

At length he fell off into an uneasy slumber, which was disturbed by dreams of the most terrific description.

They were a distorted image of the events which had recently taken place, and in them Blueskin, Jonathan Wild, and Edgworth Bess figured in strange confusion.

By degrees, however, as exhausted Nature asserted her claims, his sleep deepened, until at length he slumbered profoundly and dreamlessly.

It was evening when he awoke, and the room was already full of shadow.

But though he awoke he did not offer to move, but lay quite still upon the bed.

In the silence and semi-darkness of that room he thought he should be better able to collect his thoughts than elsewhere.

He tried to keep himself calm, but this was a most difficult task.

At one moment he thought he would hunt the kingdom over until he found Edgworth Bess.

At the next he would determine to discover whether Blueskin really was an inmate of Wild's house, and if so to procure his freedom, and then, with his assistance, endeavour to discover Edgworth Bess.

But both of these enterprises seemed to be beset with insuperable obstacles, and when he reflected upon them, his spirit, dauntless as it was, seemed to shrink back, crushed and appalled.

At length he resolved to return once more to Jonathan Wild's house.

The only hope he had was that he would be more successful than on the preceding night in discovering something that would serve him as a clue.

This determination being the only rational one he could come to, he at once put it in practice.

He took up his position much in the same place.

But on this occasion his patience was not destined to be put to so severe a trial as on the preceding one.

Soon after his arrival he saw the door of the thief-taker's house opened.

There was very little light, but still Jack was able to distinguish the forms of Jonathan Wild and someone else, whom he did not recognize.

That was Jonathan Wild's son.

As the reader, doubtless, surmises, they were about setting out upon their little expedition to the lawyer's chambers in the Temple, in search of the important packet of papers.

Jack saw them sally forth, and go arm-in-arm down the street.

What could be their destination?

This, he thought, would in all probability be well worth ascertaining; so, with a silent and stealthy tread, he followed them at a distance, taking care to keep himself concealed beneath the shadows of the houses.

Not for a moment did he lose sight of their dusky forms, which were just visible in the darkness.

He kept upon their track, and dogged them to the gate in Fleet-street leading into the Temple.

He was much surprised to find them halt here, and could not conjecture what business they could have there at such an uninvited hour of the night.

From the opposite side of the road, Jack observed all that took place.

He stood just beneath the archway leading into Bell-yard.

From this advantageous position he saw Wild, and the person by whom he was accompanied, pass through the gate.

He saw, too, that the gate was closed and locked after them.

Little did the thief-taker and his son imagine at that moment that Jack Sheppard was so close to them.

But so he was.

He watched them until they quite disappeared in the deep gloom of the Temple, and then he pressed his hands over his brow, and strove to think what would be the best thing he could do.

"He is out now," he muttered. "I am quite certain of that, and the probability is that he will remain out for some time. The coast is as clear now as I can ever hope to find it. I will return to his house at once, and try whether I cannot set the question at rest of ascertaining

whether Blueskin really is a prisoner in his hands or not."

As he uttered these words, he turned round, and made his way back to Newgate-street with all possible speed.

On his way thither, however, he occupied himself by revolving in his mind which were the best means of entering the thief-taker's house; for, as the reader may have guessed, this was what Jack had determined upon doing.

A more desperate undertaking could scarcely have been conceived, and the probability is that no one would have dreamt of attempting it but Jack Sheppard.

For some time he was unable to come to a conclusion upon this point, until, at length, he recollected the means by which he had once before entered.

"Blueskin would be in the cells, if anywhere," he muttered; "I am quite sure of that. It is to the cells, then, that I must make my way. That will do it. At least, I hope it will, but I fear Jonathan has taken means to prevent me from ever playing him such a trick again. And yet, who knows? he may have omitted to do so."

This was but a frail hope, but still Jack clung to it, for the simple reason that no better one presented itself.

It will not be necessary to tell the reader Jack's precise intentions. They will be well enough seen by following his actions.

He changed his course, then, in the first place, and did not make his way into Newgate-street; but, plunging through a wilderness of narrow streets, at length emerged into Warwick-lane.

Turning to the left, he passed on rapidly until he came to the well-remembered archway leading into Newgate-market.

The iron gates were closed and locked.

But these were no obstacles to Jack.

Looking up, he saw there was room to squeeze himself between the top of the ironwork and the masonry; and he at once set about climbing up the gates.

This was by no means a difficult feat, and Jack easily accomplished it.

He let himself down in safety on the other side.

The market was plunged in utter darkness, but, heedless of that, Jack pursued his course unhesitatingly in a certain direction.

Down the long, dark avenues he sped, until, at length, he paused before a small door set in the wall.

He ran his hand hastily over it, in the hope of finding a fastening of some kind, but in this hope he was defeated.

Then he tried whether it would yield, but it resisted all the pressure he could apply to it.

Finding this to be the case, he made no further attempt to open it, but, retracing his steps along the passage, emerged into one of the open places in the market.

Here he looked about him for a moment, and then made his way towards a shed, the roof of which he endeavoured to gain.

There were several projections of various kinds, and of these he availed himself.

By their aid he succeeded in getting upon the roof of the shed.

This was slanting, but he made his way up it at good speed, for he never stumbled once.

Upon reaching the top of the shed, he found himself upon a wall of great thickness.

He looked down, and endeavoured to ascertain the depth to the ground.

He failed to do this, but he fancied the depth was considerable.

Still he did not hesitate.

Carefully lowering himself over the brink, until he hung down the full length of his arm, he prepared to drop the distance.

He let go as soon as he had steadied himself, and reached the ground with rather a severe shock.

But he did not lose his feet.

He could not avoid making some slight noise in his fall, and now he stopped and listened whether any alarm had been given before he ventured to move.

But all was still.

Finding this to be the case, he turned round.

"At last," he muttered. "At last."

From what has been previously related, we doubt not

that the reader will be already aware of what place it was into which Jack had thus made his way.

It was the yard at the back of the thief-taker's house.

It will be recollected that, on a former occasion, he had been so fortunate as to discover in the yard a secret mode of entrance to the cells.

For what reason this secret and apparently disused entrance had been constructed, Jack knew not, though the mystery will be cleared up.

Without much trouble Jack found the iron ring in the flagstone.

He turned it round as before, and was rejoiced to find the slab come up when he pulled.

In precisely the same manner, then, as was related at full-length in the eighty-fourth chapter of this history, he made his way into the corridor from which the cells opened.

Scarcely, however, had he passed though the secret door and closed it after him, than he heard a faint sound, as though someone was descending the steps at the further end of the passage, and about to pay a visit to the cells.

This suspicion was very quickly converted into a certainty.

He distinctly heard the tread of a heavy foot upon the stone steps.

Then he saw the faint glimmering of a light upon the moist and humid walls.

Someone was coming.

For a moment Jack forgot that Wild was from home, and the dread came over his heart that it was no other than the thief-taker who was approaching.

But, whether it was or not, his discovery seemed certain.

What should he do?

Hastily he glanced round him in search of a hiding-place, but none appeared.

Cell-doors were on each side of him.

He knew that, when unoccupied, the cells were merely fastened by an iron bar, which was placed across them, and sometimes not even by this.

This suggested a chance—a desperate chance, but the only one.

He might make his way into one of the empty cells, and secrete himself there until the visit was over.

Acting upon this, he lifted down, with the utmost rapidity, the bar which was placed across the door nearest to him.

He pushed the door.

It yielded.

The cell, then, was an empty one.

He glided in with the swiftness of an apparition.

CHAPTER CCCV.

WILD, JUNIOR, HAS SOME TROUBLE IN FINDING A SECURE HIDING-PLACE FOR THE PACKET OF PAPERS.

The tide of events now carries us away from Jack Sheppard, but only for a moment.

We shall return to a relation of what happened to him after entering the empty cell almost immediately.

We wish now, for a short time, to direct the attention of the reader to the proceedings of Wild, junior.

After so successfully removing the suspicions which his father had entertained, namely, that he (George) had stolen the packet of papers, his features expanded into a grin, as the thief-taker left his bedchamber and closed the door after him.

He remained without moving for some moments, and with precisely the same expression of satisfaction upon his countenance.

This was while he listened to the sound of his father's retreating footsteps, in order to make sure that he really had gone away and not made a pretence of doing so while he lurked just outside the door in readiness to pop in at an unexpected moment.

He knew his worthy parent was quite capable of such a trick.

Indeed, he was not satisfied with hearing him retire, but he crossed the floor of the room stealthily, and then opened the door with great suddenness.

But all this cleverness was expended in vain.

Jonathan Wild was not there.

He had really retired.

What suspicions he had had, his son had succeeded, by his consummate cunning and address, in removing.

All without was dark and silent, and it was with a feeling of the utmost satisfaction that Wild, junior, closed the door again and turned the key in the lock, so as to be secure from any very sudden intrusion.

"There really is no sort of doubt," he muttered, in a low tone of voice; "there is really no sort of doubt that the gov'nor's a d-d fool, or else he would not have suffered himself to be taken in in this manner. It's either that, or else I'm a d-d clever fellow. I think it must be the last, for the gov'nor would not take me in very easily."

He sat himself down on the edge of the bed.

"I have got those papers all safe," he continued; "there's no sort of doubt about that. And very important they are, too. But, most of all, the gov'nor has no suspicion. He had at first, though. How strange he should hit upon the guilty party so soon! However, he will be rather confused now, I think. Bat, stop! I must not congratulate myself so fast. I have got the papers, but where shall I hide them?—that's the question."

Wild, junior, looked all round his bedchamber as he spoke.

"I must find a good hiding-place, a poor one won't do at all. I shall never be able to tell when the gov'nor may feel his suspicions return, nor how soon he may take it into his head to make a thorough search of this room. Where on earth can I hide them?"

This was a very, very important question, and Wild, junior, felt all its momentousness.

He rose from his seat on the bedside, and went all over the room, peering into odd nooks and corners, and shaking his head every time he asked himself the question whether the place would suit.

He knew his father was not an ordinary man, more especially when looking for hidden things was concerned; and, therefore, it behooved him to be very careful where he deposited the precious packet.

An hour passed by without his having come to any definite decision.

At one time he thought of leaving his room, and secreting the packet in some other part of the house, but he considered the risk of it being found was almost, if not quite, as great; and besides which, there was the chance of exciting his father's suspicions afresh if he heard him leave his chamber.

He had thought of every hiding-place the room afforded, but without being over well pleased with either; but at length he decided upon one which he considered, upon reflection, was the most eligible.

This was beneath the flooring of the room, or, rather, between it and the ceiling of the room below.

He imagined that if he carefully raised one of the planks and placed the packet under it, and then fastened the plank down in such a manner that its ordinary appearance was preserved, that it would be likely to escape his father's observation, should any search be made.

At any rate, as he could find out no better hiding-place, he was, in a manner of speaking, compelled to adopt it.

Before he commenced operations he went to the door, and, opening it, looked out and listened.

All was silent.

Believing, then, that he had the place entirely to himself, he closed the door again, and, having locked it, set about his task of concealing the papers without further loss of time.

He took his candle, and, by the aid which its dim light afforded, made as good an examination of the floor as he was able.

The thief-taker's house was an old one, and in this chamber, as in most of the others, the flooring was worn and uneven, so that the removal and replacement of a board would not be so likely to be noticed as it would in a room where the floor was even and level.

Moreover, his task would be much easier.

Wild, junior, deposited the candle on the floor, and produced from his pocket a crowbar.

It was in two pieces; each about twelve inches in length.

They screwed together in the middle, and then formed a very effective weapon for burglarious and other purposes.



[ABEL DONMULL RECEIVES HIS DEATH AT THE HANDS OF JONATHAN WILD.]

One end was quite sharp, being formed into a kind of spike.

With this Wild, junior, would have little trouble in raising a board.

He knelt down, and inserted it between one of the crevices.

A crackling, splitting noise followed which rather alarmed him, and he stopped suddenly and listened.

He was afraid the sounds would reach his father's ears, and be the means of betraying him.

But no one seemed disturbed, and, reassured by the silence, he recommenced his task with greater caution.

Still he could not be quite silent; a slight splitting noise as the nails were wrenched from their hold was unavoidable.

At every few minutes would he pause to listen, and his excited fancy made him think he heard slight sounds which, in reality, existed only in his imagination.

At length he raised the board sufficiently to answer his purpose, and, by using the crow-bar as a prop, kept it in the required position.

He looked down into the space below.

It was half-filled with dust and cobwebs.

The place seemed admirably adapted for the concealment of any small object, such as the packet of papers.

George took hold of it, and, not without some misgiving, consigned it to the dark recess.

He was full of dread lest it should be discovered.

In order to preserve the papers as much as possible from receiving any external injury, he wrapped them up carefully in his handkerchief.

He then pushed them under the flooring, until a joist prevented him from pushing them any further.

The most difficult part of his task, however, had yet to come.

That was to replace the board in such a manner that no suspicion should be aroused by its presenting an altered appearance.

It was necessary, too, that this should be done silently.

He removed the iron bar, and gently pressed the piece of wood back into its place.

In raising it, however, the rusty nails by which it was

secured had been bent to such a degree that he could not press it down close.

He had no resource but to draw them out and straighten them, and this was a task which quite exhausted his patience.

But at last it was accomplished.

Then, one by one, he placed them in the holes provided for their reception, and by the aid of the blunt end of the crow-bar hammered them down.

"Thank the fates!" he said, as he raised himself and straightened his back, "that job is over. I believe I have done it all right. I don't believe the gov'nor or anyone else heard me, I made such a little noise. I must alter the look of that, though."

Looking down at his work, he perceived a small heap of black dust, which, in some way or other, he must have removed from the recess beneath.

It lay upon the floor, and would, perhaps, be the means of exciting suspicion.

He stooped down with the intention of removing it, but it then occurred to him that he might make it useful.

Taking it up between his finger and thumb, he patiently filled with it the interstice between the edges of the board he had removed, and those next to it.

When this was accomplished, he thought his hiding-place would defy detection.

"The gov'nor's a d—d sight cleverer than I take him to be if he finds that out. I know he won't do it, for there is nothing suspicious about that plank, any more than there is about the rest. Now I have him in my power. But let me see. How shall I act now? I must be careful, or he will get the best of me. Now, I wonder whether it would answer my purpose best to turn round against him altogether? If I thought so, I would do it in a moment. I must not be too precipitate, however, or else I may spoil myself altogether. I had better get into bed, and think the matter quietly over. I may as well take time to consider. There is no need to precipitate matters; not a bit."

And so George Wild, very well pleased with himself and his prospects, prepared to retire to rest.

As he had said, he tried to think the matter over, and decide what he should do.

While thus engaged, he fell off to sleep.

When this event took place, however, he could not say, nor how long his slumber continued, but he was aroused by hearing a slight sound.

He did not thoroughly awake, but lay in a state of semi-consciousness.

But, the noise being repeated, he opened his eyes, but he had the prudence not to make the slightest movement.

He found, upon opening his eyes, that the room was not perfectly dark, but that a faint gray light pervaded the whole of it.

It was so faint, though, that the familiar objects by which he was surrounded appeared confused and indistinct.

The light came from the window, and was the first gleam of the coming dawn.

Suddenly the noise, whatever it was, ceased.

From the position he occupied, Wild, junior, commanded a view of the door of the apartment.

It was from this direction that the disturbing sounds had come.

As he gazed with straining eyes, he saw the door gently and slowly open.

"That's the gov'nor," he thought, but remained as motionless as before.

At another moment his surmise was verified.

A head was thrust into the room.

The dim, gray light fell upon it.

It was the head of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker.

The object of his visit may easily be conjectured.

After continuous reflection, his old suspicions returned to his mind, and the more he pondered over them the stronger they became.

He resolved, at any rate, to pay a stealthy visit to his son's chamber.

So near as the thief-taker and his interests are concerned, it is rather a pity he did not come to this determination sooner than he did.

As he had, he would have found how George was betrayed.

As it was, day was just breaking when, with the stealthy

tread of an assassin, he left his own chamber, and made his way towards that occupied by his hopeful son.

The door was locked.

But, as we know, such a trifle as that was nothing to Jonathan Wild.

He produced a picklock, and it was the noise he made with this instrument which reached the ears of George and awoke him.

After the bolt of the lock was shot back, he waited a moment and listened; but, as all appeared to be still, he opened the door, and thrust his head into the room, as we have already described.

As soon as Wild, junior, saw who it was, he, of course, guessed what had taken place in his mind, and guessed his errand too.

He resolved to have something like a revenge for this visit, and, if possible, frighten his father out of paying him another.

It was George Wild's custom always to sleep with a brace of pistols, ready for instant service, under the bolster.

Gently and noiselessly, then, he glided his hand towards them, and got hold of one.

It was on full cock, so he would have nothing to do but pull the trigger.

He was not ready to do this yet, so he put his hand under the clothes, though, when he did so, he grasped the pistol by the stock, and had his finger on the trigger.

Then he feigned to be asleep.

By the time he had done this, Jonathan Wild had satisfied himself that his son was asleep, and he accordingly made his way in.

The first thing he did, was to crawl on his hands and knees towards the bedside.

Then he slowly raised himself, in order to have a look at his son's face.

This was the moment for which Wild, junior, had waited.

Suddenly, pretending to awake, he started upright in bed, and, at the same moment, he drew the pistol and fired it.

He took care not to wound the thief-taker, because he knew, if he had done such a thing, the consequences would have been most serious to himself.

Still, the bullet whistled past Jonathan's head in any-thing but pleasant proximity.

He uttered a tremendous shout, which mingled strangely with the report of the pistol.

Then, for the first time, Wild, junior, pretended to recognise who his visitor was.

He flung down the pistol, and cried, in tones of well-affected surprise—

"Well, I'll be d—d, gov'nor, is that you? Why, who would have thought it! I haven't hurt you, have I?"

"No, curse it!" exclaimed the enraged thief-taker; "but you might have done! What the devil did you want to fire your pistol at me in that way for?"

"Why, gov'nor, I didn't know it was you. In fact, I woke up suddenly; seeing someone close to my bedside, I fired off the pistol under the impulse of the moment."

"Oh! d—n your impulses!" yelled the thief-taker, who was not only annoyed beyond measure at his son's easy manner, but also at the failure of his scheme. "It was a wonder you didn't kill me."

"It was, indeed. But I did not stay to take aim. Be- stop a minute, gov'nor."

"What now?"

"How did you get in?"

"How did I get in?"

"Yes."

"Through the door, of course."

"I don't know how you did it, then, for it's d—d odd to me if I didn't lock the door before I got into bed, and that's why I thought it so strange that anyone should be close to the bed."

"You must be mistaken," said the thief-taker, with a grim smile. "The door opened to my hand."

It was on the tip of George's tongue to say—

"Yes, but not until you had picked the lock;" but he wisely refrained from uttering the words.

"It's a good job," he continued, "that matters have turned out to be no worse. I thought someone was going to rob me, or something, but the fact is, the thing was done so suddenly that I scarcely thought at all."

"Then you had better, another time."

"But what did you want, guv'nor? I forgot to ask you that before."

Jonathan had anticipated this question, and had resolved how to reply to it.

It would be no good, he thought, to let his son know just what brought him there on the present occasion.

He did not say one word about his suspicions.

He merely replied—

"I want you to get up."

"But I have only just come to bed."

"Pho—pho! Look up; it is morning."

"What do you want me to get up for?"

"Why, I feel very uneasy about those papers, and I want you to go down to the river at once and try and find the waterman in whose boat we sat, and ask him whether he has found them. If so, they are probably still in his possession, and for a small sum he might easily be induced to give them up."

George Wild had all his thoughts about him while the thief-taker thus spoke.

His reflections ran somewhat in this fashion.

"Artful devil, the guv'nor, d—d if he isn't. I see his game. He wants me out of the way. He suspects I have got the papers. If I hesitate about going he will be convinced of it. If I do go, why, he will take advantage of my absence to make a thorough search of the chamber. He has me, any way. What the devil shall I do?"

Truly was he between the horns of a dilemma.

However, he knew it would not do to hesitate, so he scrambled out of bed with affected alacrity, and hastily attired himself.

Then he announced his readiness to start.

The thief-taker accompanied him as far as the front door, and here they parted.

Jonathan watched his son round the corner of the Old Bailey, and, as soon as he had disappeared, he turned in and went straight upstairs to his son's chamber.

He had got rid of him for some time, at any rate, he thought.

But he reckoned without his host.

Wild, junior, knew that his father was watching him, but, the moment he turned the corner of the Old Bailey and he knew he was out of his sight, he paused.

"I know what the guv'nor's up to," he said, "just as well as if I could see him at this moment. Ha! stop! I have a thought! I will go back and pretend I want something I left behind me. Then I shall just catch him."

No sooner had he come to this decision, than he proceeded to act upon it.

Back again he went like a shot.

He knocked softly at the front door, and it was immediately opened by Tonks.

George said not a word, but, as light as foot could fall, sped upstairs to his own room.

The door was open.

He approached with the utmost stealthiness.

He reached the door unperceived, and peeped into the room.

There, as he fully expected, with his hands behind him and his eyes roaming inquisitively about the room, stood the thief-taker.

George watched a moment, and then saw him go to the bed, and, one by one, pull the things off it and shake them.

While he was thus engaged, Wild, junior, pounced into the room.

"Hullo! guv'nor!" he yelled, in tones that fairly made the thief-taker start again, "what the devil are you about? Are you going to make my bed for me?"

Jonathan turned round.

An angry look was on his face.

"What have you come back for?"

"What have I come back for? Why, for something, I rather think. Who would have thought of seeing you here?"

"What have you come back for?" repeated the thief-taker, impatiently.

"Why, the fact is, guv'nor, as soon as I got outside I found I had got no arms about me; and, as I did not fancy going out totally unprovided with weapons, I thought I would just pop in again and fetch the pistol I fired off a little while ago."

"D—n you pistol," exclaimed the thief-taker, enraged to think his pretext for getting his son out of the house was detected by him. "D—n your pistol."

"Just as you like, guv'nor," rejoined Wild, junior, with his customary coolness. "But what on earth are you about? Curse me if I can make you out."

"Can't you indeed, George?" said the thief-taker, looking at his son with a leer. "Such a clever youth as you ought to be able to do that. Come, now, what's the good of disguise? You know what I came here for just as well as myself, and that is the reason you came back and popped into the room so suddenly."

"Then you would make me believe that you can make me out?"

"Just as you like. I leave you to draw your own conclusions. I have missed the papers, and I can't help thinking you have taken them."

"Then, if that is the case, guv'nor, we had better dissolve partnership. I can never get on when I know I am mistrusted and suspected. What a d—d fool you must be! Just as if the papers would be any good to me."

"Come, George, there's no harm done. I suspected you. You are such a clever fellow, you know; and I thought it just possible you had taken the papers. I resolved to satisfy myself, and sent you out. You penetrated my design, and returned unexpectedly, and caught me in the act of searching. Where's the harm?"

"Why it just amounts to this. If you can't trust me, we had better part."

"Stuff, we are useful to each other. Now, George, just listen to me."

"I am listening."

"If you really did take those papers, confess it, and I will forgive the offence. Restore them to me, and I will think no more of the matter. To you those papers cannot be half so valuable as they are to me. You have no idea how much depends upon my having them in my possession."

George Wild listened to this proposal in silence.

But, when his father had done speaking, his resolve remained unaltered.

The very anxiety which his father manifested to regain possession of the papers convinced him still more of their importance.

"Now, guv'nor," he said, with well-assumed frankness, "do let this bit of foolery drop. I tell you I have not got the papers. What good are they to me? The idea is so ridiculous, that it is a mystery to me how you entertain it. Let us hear no more of it, and I will promise you to do my best to assist you to recover the papers. Is it a bargain?"

"It is," said the thief-taker.

"Very good, then," rejoined his son; "see that you keep to it. Don't mention it again. Now, do you want me to go down to the boat, or was it all fudge?"

"If you will go," said the thief-taker, "I should be glad. It is just possible I dropped them in the boat."

"It's a d—d sight more possible than that I took them, I can tell you that. And now, guv'nor, while I am gone, do just leave my room alone. If you turn it inside out, you will meet with no reward for your trouble."

"I will take you at your word," said the thief-taker, with a grin.

"All right," said George. "I am really off this time."

He left the room as he spoke, and made his way to the front door.

In another moment he was on his way to the water-side.

He knew his journey would be a bootless one, but he did not care for that.

He knew his father would most likely set some one on his track; and, if he did not go to the appointed spot, his suspicions would return with full force.

It was a strange partnership which existed between these two villains.

Mutually distrustful of each other, they knew just what reliance to place upon each other's words; and Wild, junior, did not doubt, although he had been assured to the contrary, that his father was at that moment engaged in making a thorough search of the room.

But Wild, junior, had faith in the security of his hiding-place, and suffered very little, if any, apprehension as to the result of the search.

CHAPTER CCCVI.

RELATES THE EXTRAORDINARY MANNER IN WHICH JACK SHEPPARD WAS MADE A PRISONER IN THE CELLS BENEATH WILD'S HOUSE.

THE hiding-place which Jack Sheppard sought when he heard someone descending the stone steps that led to the corridor from which the dungeons beneath the thief-taker's house opened, was about as strange a one as could well be imagined.

With that boldness of invention which was the characteristic of Jack Sheppard throughout the whole of his life, he hit upon the daring idea of concealing himself in one of the cells, until the danger of discovery with which he was menaced should be past.

Surely anyone would think that one of the last places in the world in which Jack would be likely to take refuge, would be one of Wild's cells.

But so it was.

Strange things happen; and, as we have seen, he voluntarily assumed a prisoner's position.

With the swiftness and silence of a spectre, he glided through the door, which, fortunately for him, gave way to the pressure he applied to it.

His first impulse upon entering the dungeon was to close the door after him.

To secure it in any way was impossible.

He pushed it to.

Then, fearful of running the risk of remaining too near the door, he resolved to make his way to one of the distant corners.

The cell was profoundly dark.

Still he hastened forward, for he was familiar with the plan upon which they had been constructed.

He relied too much upon his knowledge.

Suddenly his foot came in contact with some obstacle that lay upon the floor.

So unexpected was this, that he was unable to recover himself, and fell heavily upon the ground.

In falling, he struck his forehead against one of the stone walls which formed the boundary of the cell.

The violence of the blow was so great as to at once deprive him of his senses.

There was a convulsive movement of his limbs, and he lay, utterly bereft of sense or motion, upon the damp flooring.

What happened after this he knew not.

The person he had heard descending the steps, which led from the hall in Wild's house to the cells beneath, was no other than that confidential janizary, Quilt Arnold.

In the absence of the thief-taker, it was part of his duty to see that the prisoners were all safe and their necessities attended to, and this it was that caused his visit on the present occasion.

When about halfway down the steps, he fancied some strange sound reached his ears, and he paused to listen.

But all was still.

He imagined, therefore, his hearing had deceived him, or else that he had mistaken some slight sound from above.

Quilt carried a torch, for of late the air in the corridor had been so impure as to render a lantern almost useless.

As its red glare fell upon his countenance it revealed a puzzled look upon it.

He was muttering as he came along.

Something had occurred to dissatisfy him.

He paused before the door of the cell which was nearest to the foot of the flight of steps.

In his hand he held a rather large-sized key, which was made so as to open all the locks upon the cell-doors.

Thrusting it into the keyhole, he turned it round, and removed the iron bar.

He opened the door a few inches only.

Thrusting his head, and the hand which held the torch, into the cell, he gazed upon its miserable occupant.

Satisfied that all was right, he closed the door again.

This he repeated all along the corridor, doing no more than ascertaining by this means that the prisoners were all secure.

At length he came to the cell in which Jack lay in so helpless a condition.

The door was ajar, and the iron bar lying upon the ground.

"Hullo!" he ejaculated, as he made this discovery. "There's one of these bars down again. Curse me if you can depend upon anybody. Well, it's a good job I took it into my head to make my rounds before old Johnny came home. A fine row there would have been if he had happened to see this, after giving such strict orders that the bars were to be put up whether the cells were occupied or not. I'll see if I can't kick up a row about it when I go upstairs. Curse their laziness! But they knew very well I should be the sufferer, not them."

Having thus given vent to his indignation at the discovery he had made, Quilt Arnold came a little closer.

"I can't understand it," he continued. "This here's one of the empty cells, to my knowledge, and has never been occupied since—but no matter. I wonder what on earth they wanted to take that bar down for. However, before I put it up again, I think my best plan will be to take a look inside."

It was almost fortunate for Jack that he was insensible when this took place.

He would have considered discovery inevitable, and, under that idea, might, perhaps, have got himself into fresh difficulty.

As it was, he lay like a log on the floor, in one of the furthestmost corners, quite unconscious of this fresh danger.

The torch which Quilt carried had burned away a good deal, and now gave forth but a dim light; so he knocked it up against the wall to improve its lustre.

This done, he pushed the door open a little further, and looked in, much in the same manner as he had looked into the others.

He waved the torch about in the endeavour to dissipate the darkness, which here appeared to be profound.

Then, satisfied by this casual glance that all presented its usual appearance, he withdrew again.

The torch had failed to show him the dark form of Jack lying, a huddled-up mass, in one of the remote corners.

He closed the door with a loud clang, which roused a thousand echoes in that dismal, subterranean place.

But it failed to awaken Jack.

His swoon was too deep to be removed by any such means.

Quilt Arnold next raised the iron bar, and thrust it through the staples provided for its reception.

Jack was a prisoner.

As he put up the bar, Quilt muttered—

"I'll kick up a row about this, curse me if I don't! But I'll guard against this cell being left open another time; and I don't suppose it will ever want to be used, because"—

Quilt broke off abruptly, and did not finish what he was about to say.

Plunging his hand into his pocket he drew forth the key which he had used to lock the other doors.

He thrust it into the keyhole.

He turned it round.

A sharp click followed, as the bolt shot into the matrix provided for it.

"That will do it, I rather think," said Quilt Arnold, with a chuckle, as he drew out the key, and restored it to his pocket. "I shan't be bothered with that door being left open another time, I know."

Thus satisfied, both with himself and what he had done, Quilt stalked away, and continued his examination of the prisoners until his task was finished, and then he returned to the upper air.

In the meantime, Jack still lay in the same insensible and lifeless state in the corner of the cell.

Little did Quilt think of the service he had unconsciously done for the thief-taker, in making prisoner he who had been a source of so much trouble to him.

Had he known that he had made Jack Sheppard a prisoner, how elated he would have been.

But he was denied that piece of knowledge, though, if he had performed his duty in a proper manner, and taken the trouble to enter the cell, instead of just putting his head into it in the manner he had done, he would have been in possession of it.

Fate, however, had decreed differently.

Quilt Arnold remained ignorant.

As for Jack, how long he remained in that state of insensibility he never knew, but he fancied it must have

been a long time, for when he at length did recover, he felt cold, hungry, and wretched.

Consciousness was restored to him by very slow degrees.

His first sensation was a most intolerable headache, which proceeded from the terrible blow he had received by coming into contact with the wall.

This at first so distracted him that he was unable to think of anything.

Presently, however, the violence of the pain abated, and he opened his eyes.

Recollection had not yet returned to him, and he was astonished to find himself surrounded by total darkness.

For a moment an awful idea took possession of his mind, and that was that he was blind!

But he endeavoured to banish this thought, and to recollect what were the events which had last happened to him.

For a long while he was unable to do this.

His intellects were in a sad state of confusion, and anything like clear thought, while his head ached in the frightful manner it now did, seemed quite out of the question.

By slow degrees, however, as he lay perfectly still upon the ground, all his late proceedings dawned upon his mind.

But he was compelled to begin at a distant point, and trace all his actions forward from it.

He recollected at last how he had made his way to the cells beneath Wild's house; how he had heard someone approaching, and how he had hit upon the desperate expedient of concealing himself in one of the empty cells.

He remembered lifting down the bar, and gliding through the door.

He remembered closing it after him, and hastening across the dungeon; but at this point recollection ceased.

After that circumstance, all was a blank.

In vain he tortured his mind to recollect something further.

He was compelled, in the end, to give it up in despair.

He passed his hand over his forehead, as though he would clear his brain of the mists which hung before it.

In doing so, his hands came in contact with the lump which the fall against the stone wall had raised.

It was painful to a degree.

But this furnished the missing link which connected the chain of thought.

He recollected when he hastened across the cell that he had stumbled over some object which lay upon the floor.

In falling he must have struck his head against some hard substance, and that had caused the lump upon his forehead, and a fit of insensibility.

Having recovered his recollection so far, he now tried to ascertain how long he had been unconscious.

In this, however, he was completely baffled.

It might have been hours—it might have been days.

He had no means of telling, and probably never would have.

He was hungry, cold, and thirsty.

From these symptoms, he fancied his swoon must have lasted for a long time.

As yet, the reader will perceive, the suspicion that he had been made a prisoner never crossed his mind—nor, indeed, was it likely to do so.

He sat still for some time, endeavouring to recover his usual energy and spirit.

Fortunately, he had in his pockets a supply both of food and drink, for he knew not what emergency might arise.

He now had good reason to congratulate himself upon his forethought.

After his meal he felt much better.

The pain in his head subsided, and he was about to rise to his feet, with the intention of leaving the cell, when he fancied he should be easily enough able to do, when his whole attention was suddenly attracted by the sounds of many footsteps in the corridor without.

CHAPTER CCXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD HEARS SOME STRANGE SOUNDS WHILE AN INMATE OF WILD'S CELL, AND HAS HIS ESCAPE INTERRUPTED.

FULL of the most breathless eagerness and impatience to know what these sounds signified, Jack Sheppard paused in his intention of seeking the cell-door.

Crouching down upon the floor, he concentrated all his faculties into the one of listening.

He was anxious that no sound—no matter how unimportant it might seem—should escape him.

The footsteps came nearer.

Jack could tell not only that several persons were approaching, but also that they were coming from the direction of the staircase.

Nearer they came, until he fancied they must be almost opposite his cell-door.

Could it be possible that that was their destination?

As he asked himself this question, the idea first occurred to him that he might have been discovered while in his unconscious state and made a prisoner, and that those who were now approaching intended to make him more secure than he then was.

As this awful supposition crossed his mind, the blood in his veins seemed to turn to ice, and his heart to cease to beat.

As we know, Jack was both wrong and right.

He was wrong in thinking he had been discovered, but right in fancying himself a prisoner.

In spite of his terrible thoughts, he had the presence of mind to remain perfectly still, and not to make any movement to betray himself.

It was fortunate for him that he did so.

The trampling footsteps paused.

They were either just opposite the door of his cell, or else a yard or two past it.

Which of the two it was he could not tell.

Suddenly he heard a voice.

He recognised it.

Its tones thrilled through him.

It was the voice of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker.

Jack could not distinguish the words he uttered, though he strove his utmost to do so.

A growling sound alone reached his ears.

Then he heard the rattle of a key, thrust hastily and impatiently into a lock.

Then, for the first time, Jack became aware that they had paused, not before the door of the cell in which he then was, but before the door of the one adjoining it.

He was surprised to hear the rattling of the key and the click of the bolt of the lock with so much distinctness as he had, when he could not distinguish the words uttered by the thief-taker, but he learned the reason almost immediately.

He heard the door of the adjoining cell grate open upon its hinges.

Then, to his surprise, all the sounds which he had before heard now reached his ears with much greater plainness.

If he had been in doubt about this, and thought his fancy was playing him a trick, he would have been convinced that he was not mistaken, for he could now hear what was said.

heard Wild speak.

The tones of his voice grated upon his ear.

"Now, then!" he said, "bring him in, can't you? Are you going to be all day?"

"Coming, Mr. Wild!" replied a chorus of respectful voices.

The trampling of feet followed, and it seemed to Jack that the prisoner to whom the thief-taker evidently alluded was bodily carried into the cell by the janizaries.

He had no time, however, for reflection, for he heard Wild say, in an impatient manner—

"Where's Godfrey?"

"Here I am," said a voice, in reply.

"Have you got the irons ready?"

"All ready, Mr. Wild."

The clanking of fetters followed these words, as though Godfrey wished to prove the truth of his assertion.

"Come on, then," said Jonathan. "Put them on, and be quick about it; but be sure you put them on securely."

"Depend upon me, Mr. Wild."

Jack was at no loss to comprehend what was taking place—indeed, he understood it almost as well as if he had been able to see as well as hear.

Some poor, helpless, wounded wretch had been brought into the cell, a prisoner, and Jonathan was about to be barbarous enough to place the fetters upon him.

Godfrey was the name of the man who, when required, performed the functions of smith.

No more was said for the space of some moments.

The silence was only broken by the clink of the smith's hammer upon the little portable anvil, as he riveted the fetters.

He ceased, and then Wild spoke again.

"Have you done?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Wild; and I'll warrant them secure."

"That will do, then. Be off!"

The tramping of feet, as the janizaries left the cell, immediately followed this command.

The heavy tread of the thief-taker followed them. Jack could distinguish it from all the rest.

He heard the door closed with a violence that raised a thousand reverberating echoes.

The key was turned in the lock.

The iron bar was placed in the staples.

Then the whole of the party retired, and silence once more prevailed in that subterranean region.

For some time after their departure, Jack remained perfectly still.

But, though his body was still, his thoughts were active.

He listened for a long time, in order to make sure that Wild and his janizaries had really left the cells.

All remained silent.

He listened for some sound from the tenant of the next dungeon, but none came.

At length, rising to his feet, Jack went towards the door.

He was ill prepared for what awaited him there.

His thoughts were wholly occupied with elaborating the details of his daring plan.

Convinced that Blueskin was in one of the cells, he determined to spare no trouble in releasing him from his perilous position.

His retreat, he believed, he had already secured; and his enterprise assumed, at least, the appearance of success.

But that appearance was deceptive.

With his thoughts occupied in this manner, Jack groped his way towards the door.

He passed his hands over the stonework until he perceived it, by the difference in the feel of iron and stone—for, as we have elsewhere stated, the doors of Wild's cells were all lined with sheet-iron.

Hastily Jack ran his fingers over the crevice of the door, and tried to find a place where he could insert his fingers and pull it open.

The door was close shut, and he made the attempt in vain.

Still, he could not realize what had befallen him.

He tried the other side of the door, but with the same result.

He felt over the whole of its surface, up to as high as he could reach.

Then the horrible conviction was forced upon him that the door had been secured from without, and that he was a prisoner.

His brain whirled when he made this discovery.

What had happened during his long swoon?

A thousand terrible questions suggested themselves to his mind, and, entirely overcome, he sank down upon the ground.

He extended himself at full length upon the earthen flooring, and clasped his aching head with his hands.

Could it be possible that he, who had made his way to that dismal place with the intention of setting his friend at liberty, should himself become a prisoner?

More tightly still, he pressed his hands upon his brow, and tried to think more calmly, to bring back more correctly to his mind the occurrences of the past, and to reason more logically upon his present position.

He found this task a difficult one indeed.

He rose again to his feet, and made another examination of the door, the result of which was a conviction that he was indeed a prisoner.

The door was as firm and immovable as a rock, and resisted all the frantic attempts he made to shake it.

Again he tried to think.

The door had been fastened during his swoon.

Of that he could, at any rate, feel certain.

The question which now presented itself to his mind—and a terrible and important one it was—was whether he had been discovered by the person who had closed the door.

It appeared most likely.

If so, how was it he had not been re-visited by his old foe, the thief-taker?

How was it that he had passed the door of his cell without looking in, as he felt certain that he must have done?

Vainly did Jack strive to find plausible replies to these questions.

They perplexed and troubled him, and that was all.

He started.

A slight sound had struck upon his ear and disturbed his meditations, which, deep as they were, did not make him insensible of external impressions.

The sound came again.

This time he recognised its character.

It was a hollow groan.

His first sensations were those of alarm at hearing such a sound in such a place.

But this feeling soon subsided.

He recollected the inmate of the adjoining dungeon, whom he pictured grievously hurt and loaded with heavy fetters.

It was from him, doubtless, that the groan proceeded.

He listened for a repetition of it, in order to be sure that he was not mistaken.

He had not long to wait.

Another groan, such as could alone be wrung from man's lips by the most awful suffering, struck upon his ear.

All doubts were now over.

Jack was certain that it came from the prisoner he had heard carried into the next cell.

In a contemplation of this man's probable sufferings, he lost sight, for a few moments, of his own.

He wondered who he was, and whether he could administer any help or consolation to him.

He resolved to make an attempt as soon as ever he was in a position to do so.

At present, however, his own situation demanded the whole of his attention.

How was he to escape from the cell?

This was an accident which he had not foreseen.

Indeed, he could hardly be expected to take so strange an occurrence into his calculations.

But the prospect of working his way out of that place was not so difficult a one to Jack as it would be to most persons.

As the reader is well aware, he was not without experience in matters of this sort.

He had succeeded in making his way out of a stronger cell than the one in which he now was, and at a time, too, when he was not in half so good a position to achieve his escape.

It cannot, therefore, be said that he looked upon the task before him with any great amount of diffidence.

He relied upon his own powers.

Resolved to set to work without further delay, he commenced searching in his pockets for anything that promised to be of service to him.

He found himself but ill-provided, and yet he had several useful articles secreted about him.

Among these was a large-bladed clasp-knife, and a small, but exquisitely-made file.

In the hands of such a person as Jack Sheppard, wonders could be done with such tools even as these.

He determined to begin with the clasp-knife.

Opening it, he made his way towards the door.

His intention was to pick away the mortar around the lock, and so open the door by that means.

Whether he would have succeeded or not is hard to say.

Scarcely had he taken the knife, and commenced operations by chipping out a small piece of mortar, than he heard a sound which warned him to desist without he wished to run the risk of immediate discovery.

He ceased, of course.

The sound was one familiar enough to Jack's ears.

It was a footstep.

This time, however, it was that of one person only.

Jack could tell that in a moment.

Someone was about to pay another visit to the cells.

CHAPTER CCOVIII.

JACK SHEPPARD MAKES AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY, AND IS THE UNSUSPECTED AUDITOR OF AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE.

JACK could not refrain from uttering a curse at this unlooked-for interruption to his proceedings.

It was useless, though, and he knew it.

There was nothing left for him to do but to wait with patience and bide his time.

On came the footstep, and, as it came nearer, causing him in consequence to hear it with greater plainness, Jack recognised it.

Too often had he heard that heavy and peculiar tread to be mistaken upon the point.

It was Jonathan Wild who was approaching.

Jack was as sure of it as if he could see him at that moment.

Breathlessly, then, he listened, for he could not divest himself of the idea that this second visit of Jonathan Wild's was in some way connected with him.

Was he about to visit him?

Jack thought so, and prepared himself for the meeting, for he could scarcely bring himself to believe that he had been made prisoner in the manner he had been without the person who secured the door knowing who he was.

But, as we happen to know, such was the case; and, after nerving himself for the encounter, which he made sure must take place, he discovered that his cell was not Jonathan's destination.

Still, the thief-taker's lumbering step stopped somewhere close at hand.

It was at the door of the adjoining cell.

Jack heard the fastenings undone, and could tell that Jonathan had entered the cell.

What was his errand there?

This it was important he should find out, for Jack could not help thinking that all Wild's proceedings were in some way or other connected with himself.

He had no fear of not being able to hear what passed, because on the previous occasion every word had reached his ears with almost as much distinctness as they would if they were spoken in his own cell.

He listened eagerly.

He heard Wild address the prisoner in tones of mocking hilarity, which grated terribly upon his nerves.

Why should he speak to his prisoner thus?

Jack listened for some reply to Wild's speech.

None came.

Jonathan continued in the same sneering tone.

Then the prisoner spoke.

But the first word he uttered in reply caused Jack to start violently.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that he controlled himself from giving vent to a loud shout, so intense was his surprise.

Fortunately he was sufficiently master of his emotions to be able to repress his surprise, or, at all events, to keep it from reaching the ears of his enemy.

To this surprise disbelief succeeded.

He fancied he must surely be mistaken.

If so, he should quickly know.

The prisoner, in all probability, would speak again.

He would be prepared to pay the utmost attention.

His patience was put to a short test.

After some more taunting remarks, the prisoner spoke.

Prepared as he was, he still started.

He knew that voice.

Knew it as well as he did his own—perhaps even better.

It was Blueskin he heard speak.

He was quite sure of it.

He was the unfortunate being whose sufferings he had commiserated without knowing who he was.

It was Blueskin who had been carried into the next cell.

It was Blueskin who had been ironed so heavily.

It was Blueskin who had given utterance to those dreadful groans.

Oh! it was terrible.

This discovery was almost more than he could bear.

He sprang to his feet.

He found himself almost unable to credit the evidence of his senses.

Could it be possible that Blueskin, whose release he was so anxious to accomplish, should have been brought to the very next cell to the one of which he was the inmate under such peculiar circumstances?

His brain spun round.

He feared he was going mad.

He clasped his hands over his head.

But the conversation between the thief-taker and his prisoner in the next cell continued, and swept away all doubts.

He was not mad.

He did not dream.

What he heard going on was real.

He once more listened.

He heard his own name, coupled with that of Edgworth Bess, pronounced by the thief-taker.

He listened with, if possible, redoubled interest and eagerness.

He heard the thief-taker make the tempting offer which we have in a preceding chapter recorded; he heard, too, how Blueskin indignantly and positively refused it.

Oh! that refusal, how it went to his heart!

Never had he felt the least doubt about Blueskin's fidelity, but now he had the most convincing proof of it.

That proof was unnecessary, but still he could not help feeling pleased.

He rejoiced in the spirited manner in which he breathed his scorn and defiance at the infamous offer made to him, and his heart glowed to think that the poor, persecuted heiress had so true and tried a friend.

No words could possibly express the anxiety with which he waited for the remainder of this conversation.

Instinctively he turned his face in the direction from which the sound appeared to come.

A faint glow of light met his vision.

Looking closer, he saw from whence it proceeded, and then the mystery of his hearing so plainly all that was said in the contiguous dungeon was revealed.

He wondered he had not thought of it before, for now he recollected that the cells communicated with each other near the top.

There was a small aperture in the wall near the juncture with the roof.

This had been contrived for the purposes of ventilation, but had been found to be horribly insufficient.

There came back to Jack's mind an adventure which he once before had in one of the cells.

It was through this aperture that the faint glow of light came.

This proceeded from the torch which we have related Jonathan took with him when he paid his visit to Blueskin, and which he had stuck in a staple in the wall.

As Wild proceeded in his conversation with Blueskin, Jack gathered the gratifying intelligence that he must be ignorant of the fact of his being a prisoner in the adjoining cell.

His incarceration was, then, the effect of an accident.

He breathed more freely.

Hope regained its ascendancy in his breast.

He began to see a way out of all his difficulties and dangers.

With varying emotions, he listened to the remaining portion of the conversation which took place between Blueskin and the thief-taker.

He had no fear that Jonathan would be able to cajole his friend by any of his specious arguments.

He trusted not only to his fidelity, but to his being too well acquainted with the villain's character to suffer himself to be taken in by anything he said, or to believe that he was sincere.

Impatiently, then, we say, he waited for the conference to terminate, in order that he might have the pleasure of infusing fresh hope and joy into Blueskin's heart by communicating to him the fact that he was close at hand and ready to strain every nerve to effect his release.

But Jonathan seemed in no hurry.

As the reader is aware, the interview between them was of considerable length.

In it Jonathan exhausted every argument, and displayed every inducement which his fertile invention could suggest.

But in vain.

Blueskin's fidelity was not to be shaken.

All his trouble brought him no nearer to the point he wished to gain than he was on the preceding occasion when he made his offers.

Blueskin remained firm.

From promises Wild proceeded to threats, but these he found equally unavailing with the former.

Our old friend preserved his firmness, and suffered nothing to have the least effect upon him.

Euraged at the want of success which had attended his strenuous efforts, Jonathan Wild rose to his feet, and, to the infinite satisfaction of Jack, quitted his comrade's cell.

In his own mind, however, the thief-taker had only abandoned the siege for the present.

He resolved to renew the attack when his victim was weakened and paralyzed with hunger.

He doubted not that he should then succeed better.

It was this which caused him to break off the interview so abruptly.

He slammed the door violently behind him, and secured it with a vengeance.

As he stood in the long, vaulted passage, a thousand angry feelings warred around the heart of the thief-taker.

His brow contracted.

His eyes gleamed with a baleful lustre.

The whole expression of his countenance was terrible to behold.

Unlucky would be the individual who came before him in his present state of mind.

He had set his mind upon winning Blueskin over to his interests, and made sure of doing so upon the present occasion.

But he failed—and failed signally.

He was exasperated at his defeat, and malignant threats and horrible imprecations fell mutteringly from his lips.

Jack, who listened to his every movement with an attention which could not be realized by anyone who did not happen to be in his position, heard him close and fasten the door, and go a few steps along the passage in the direction of the flight of stairs leading into the hall.

Then he heard him pause.

Wondering what this portended, Jack, with a beating heart, remained quite still, with his sense of hearing stretched to the utmost.

The thief-taker remained for a moment quite still.

Jack pictured him in an attitude of deep thought, and his imagination did not deceive him.

Then he heard him return, and cross to the opposite side of the corridor.

"He has some other visit to pay," thought Jack. "I wonder who it is to? I am afraid there is no hope of my hearing what takes place, as I did a little while ago."

A clanging sound now made itself heard.

It was produced by the iron bar with which the cell-door was secured being cast upon the ground.

Then he heard a door unlocked, and there could no longer be a doubt about the thief-taker's intentions.

He had another visit to pay.

Jack could scarcely restrain an exclamation of impatience.

He longed to communicate with Blueskin, to make him aware of his proximity, and to infuse hope into his breast.

But the manifest impolicy of attempting to do this, while Jonathan Wild was so close at hand, sufficed to keep him silent.

The murmur of voices came upon his ear, but it was an undistinguishable hum.

For a long time it continued.

By degrees, however, he heard the voice of the thief-taker increase in loudness.

Something was exciting him.

Jack put his ear close against the door of his cell, and listened.

A succession of horrible shrieks saluted his ear.

They seemed like the death-screams of some person who suffered more than mortal agony.

They froze the blood in Jack's veins, and he made a frantic effort to burst open the door.

CHAPTER CCCIX.

JONATHAN WILD HAS HIS LAST INTERVIEW WITH LORD DONMULL.

It took but a moment, however, to convince him, not only of the futility, but the danger, of the attempt he was making.

He became suddenly silent.

As yet, he believed his presence in that cell was unsuspected, and it was important in the extreme that it should remain so.

If he could have burst open the cell-door, he would have done himself more injury than he could have done anyone else good.

His thoughts, too, reverted to Blueskin, who languished in the next cell, and who, without his timely assistance, would surely perish.

He was now seized with the dread that he might have been heard.

Once more he pressed his ear against the iron-lined door, and listened.

The horrible shrieks had ceased.

From what cause he knew not.

At any rate, all now was still.

And yet he listened in the hope of hearing more.

He had begun to despair of doing so, and was about to turn away, when a slight sound reached his ears.

He renewed his listening instantly.

Jonathan Wild had not yet, as he believed, left the cells, and it was important that he should be assured upon this point before he ventured to communicate in any way with Blueskin.

Should he, by any unlucky chance, be overheard, he would be ruined.

The reader may then imagine the intentness with which he listened.

The next sound that reached his ears was that of a door closing violently.

Immediately afterwards he heard a key turned in a lock and the bar put up.

Then followed the heavy tread of the thief-taker along the passage.

Jack fancied by the sound that he came nearer.

He paused.

Surely it was before his own door!

Was he about to enter?

Could it be possible that he had heard the hammering against the door, and was about to ascertain the cause of it?

It seemed probable.

Oh! the agony of that moment!

Jack felt as though he had been suddenly changed to stone.

To his infinite relief, however, the thief-taker continued on his way along the passage, in the direction of the flight of steps.

Jack listened to his retreating footsteps with the utmost satisfaction.

Before, however, we proceed to relate what took place between him and Blueskin, we will revert to the late proceedings of Jonathan Wild.

Jack Sheppard was ignorant of the cause of those terrible cries which he had heard, but there is no reason why the reader should be.

We will, therefore, follow the thief-taker after he left Blueskin's cell.

We have already described at full length the interview which took place between them, and its results.

We have stated in what an angry mood it was that Jonathan left the cell and closed the door behind him.

As he stood in the dark and dismal passage, a thousand angry passions were warring at his heart.

Woe to those who should cross him while in his present mood!

Wild did not seem inclined immediately to seek the surface.

For a moment he paused, with his brows knit in silent thought.

Then, making up his mind, as it would seem, upon a point about which he had some hesitation, he crossed the corridor in a diagonal direction, and paused before another of the numerous cell-doors.

He deliberately undid the ponderous fastenings.

Then, flinging open the door, he strode in.



[JACK SHEPPARD DISCOVERS BLUESKIN'S CELL.]

A quantity of impure air gushed forth, and for a moment threatened to choke him.

The torch, too, suddenly diminished in lustre.

He shook it, however, and held it up above his head.

A dim radiance only proceeded from it.

The rustling of straw followed his entrance.

At first, however, the darkness was too intense for the keen eyes of the thief-taker to pierce it.

He strode still further into the cell, in spite of the noxious odour which assailed his senses.

Then was revealed a most miserable spectacle.

Crouching down upon a small quantity of damp and discoloured straw, was something in the form of a human being, but which looked far more like a wild beast.

It was a human being, however, as its presence in that place alone would testify.

And then, if any further proof was wanting, the miserable wretch, upon seeing who was his visitor, shrank back, in horror and detestation, as far as he was able.

Then, with wildly-gleaming eyes, which glittered ominously in the darkness of the dungeon, he glared upon the thief-taker.

Jonathan cast a satisfied glance upon the abject form at his feet.

He could see it more plainly every moment.

Not only was his vision becoming accustomed to the obscurity, but the foul air, rushing out and mingling with the comparatively pure air in the passage, allowed the torch to burn with greater brilliancy.

For some few moments Wild remained in a fixed attitude, gazing upon his prisoner.

He seemed to gloat over the havoc that had taken place in that once manly and robust frame.

Now, nothing but a poor miserable being, so horribly emaciated that his bones were literally sticking through the loosely-hanging skin, met his view.

Strengthless now was that once powerful arm; attenuated that once bold intellect.

Oh! it was a spectacle most heart-rending to look upon; and yet Jonathan contemplated it unmoved—or, at all events, with a species of satisfaction.

The reader may, perhaps, recognise this miserable being; and, great as may be the abhorrence which his former actions may have excited, still, we think, when viewing him in this plight, they will not refuse some small amount of sympathy.

It was the so-called Lord Donnull; but now so strangely altered, that not even his most intimate associate would recognise him.

The envious younger brother—the treacherous friend—the abductor of his infant niece, whom he doomed to a frightful death, in order that he might step into her place—the usurper of the poor child's inheritance—the accomplished villain—the victim of his associates—such was the being who now crouched down in abject fear before the thief-taker.

Such actions as his assuredly deserved punishment, but scarcely such as he received at the hands of the villain he had taken into his confidence, to free him from the complications of his situation.

Jonathan had betrayed him.

As long as it answered his purpose, and as long as he thought it safe, he had allowed him his liberty.

But, when remorse had seized upon him, when he talked of endeavouring to repair and atone for the misery he had caused, and the wrong he had done, then Wild judged it to be imprudent to let him remain at liberty any longer.

Treacherously he decoyed him into the cell, and here he had ever since remained.

At length Wild spoke.

From his manner, it would seem as though he had waited for the prisoner to speak.

Finding, however, that he exhibited no symptoms of doing so, the thief-taker addressed him.

He employed the same sneering, mocking tones as he had used to Blueskin, only, in consequence of the angry state of his mind, they were now so much bitterer.

"Well, my lord," he said, "you don't look quite so well to-day. I am sadly afraid the atmosphere of this place does not very well agree with you. However, it can't be altered. You must make the best of it you can. Why don't you speak, eh?"

The miserable prisoner seemed to struggle with his emotion for a moment, and then he said, in a voice so hollow that it seemed as though he had issued from a tomb—

"What have I to say to you, Jonathan Wild? You pay no attention to my supplications. Release me, and I will agree to do all that you demand of me."

"You should have reasoned yourself into this state of mind a little earlier."

"What mean you?"

"It is now too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes."

"How too late?"

"Be content to know that it is."

"You forget the papers."

"No, I don't."

The prisoner glared at the mocking countenance of his captor with dismay.

He had reckoned upon those papers as a kind of security for his life.

Now Wild did not seem to care about them.

His heart sickened.

With a voice so agitated that he could scarcely utter his words with sufficient distinctness to be understood, he said—

"You misunderstand me, Jonathan Wild."

The thief-taker shook his head.

"Indeed you must do. Those papers are essentially requisite to the consummation of that scheme which you have had the audacity to contemplate."

"You admit that?"

"I do," said the prisoner, eagerly. "I assure you of it."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; they are of the utmost importance. You cannot succeed in your designs without them."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure," said the poor prisoner, with increasing eagerness.

"That's a pity."

"Why?"

"You should have told me this before."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"I cannot understand you."

"Did I not tell you it was too late?"

"Ye—es; but I cannot conceive how it could be too late."

Abel Donnull passed his hand over his forehead confusedly.

"You may take my word for it," said the thief-taker; "it is too late."

"But, I tell you again, that it is impossible for you to succeed in your plans without you have those documents in your possession."

"I admit that."

The prisoner looked puzzled and bewildered.

To Jonathan the contemplation of his cagerness and anxiety afforded the utmost delight.

He was now having his revenge upon him.

"You admit the importance of the papers," said the prisoner, after a momentary pause.

"I do. I have never attempted to deny it."

"Oh! Jonathan Wild," screamed Abel, full of the most horrible forebodings of what this scene preluded, "speak out more plainly—tell me all!"

"What more do you want to know?"

"The papers!"

"Well, what of them?"

"Release me, Jonathan Wild; fulfil your promise; let me reverse my former determination; release me, and I will place those papers in your hands."

A mocking smile came to Jonathan's lips.

"Too late," he said; "too late."

"Again those awful words," said the prisoner, wrought up to a pitch of madness.

"Yes, if they are awful words."

"To me they are, because I cannot understand them."

"They are easily enough understood, I should think."

"Jonathan Wild, listen to me."

"I am paying every attention."

"I am now a miserable object—the most wretched being on the face of the earth. So, perhaps, I ought to be. I am receiving the well-merited punishment for my villainy. Your turn will come some day."

Jonathan Wild shook visibly when these words fell with the force of a prophecy upon his ears.

The prisoner continued—

"Still, I desire my freedom; give it to me, and you shall receive those papers from me—they are now in a place where you will never find them."

CHAPTER CCCX.

LORD DONNULL AT LENGTH REAPS THE REWARD DUE TO HIS CRIMES.

"Are you sure of that?" said Jonathan, in a tone of voice that fairly made the flesh on the prisoner's bones creep again. "Are you sure that you have deposited those papers in a place where it is impossible for me, if I chose to take the trouble, to find them?"

The prisoner was silent.

For the first time he felt doubtful about the safety of the papers, and about the excellence of the hiding-place he had contrived for them.

His heart beat with redoubled violence, and he looked up to the thief-taker's countenance in a vain attempt to read his thoughts.

But he failed in this.

Making a great effort, he resolved to know the worst at once.

"Jonathan Wild," he said; "tell me—answer me—have you found those papers?"

The thief-taker did not immediately reply, but gazed mockingly upon his victim.

"If I have found them," he said, at length, in a tone of the deepest significance—"if I have found them, how much would you give for your life?"

"My life!" screamed the prisoner, the excitement of the moment lending him strength sufficient to start to his feet, and stand upright before his enemy.

"Yes," said Jonathan, unmoved, "your life!"

"But have you found the papers?"

"Did I not tell you you were too late, when you proposed to place them in my hands?"

"You did, you did."

"What conclusion, then, can you draw from that?"

"The worst."

"The worst?"

"Yes, but that is not enough for me. Tell me at once, clearly and distinctly, whether you have found the papers."

"I have."

The prisoner staggered back and almost fell.

But a momentary hope, which gleamed across his brain, enabled him to recover himself.

That hope was that the thief-taker was deceiving him, and that, in reality, he had not found the papers.

He would question him, and then all doubts would be resolved.

Jonathan noticed this, and knew the hope by which he was inspired as well as if he had expressed it.

It rejoiced him to think how completely he should be able to demolish that hope, and how bitterly his victim would be disappointed.

His countenance remained unchanged.

The prisoner could gather nothing from that.

Feverishly, he proposed his first question—

"Where did you find the papers?"

"You thought you had hidden them where I should never find them!"

"I did."

"Then you were deceived."

"I have only your word for that."

"True; but what more evidence do you require?"

"Something that I can rely upon better."

"Ha! ha!"

Abel Donnnull could not control a shudder when he heard this laugh, which sounded so fiendish and triumphant.

His heart sank again.

Still he resolved to know the worst.

"Tell me," he said again, "where did you find those papers?"

"I confess I had some trouble in the matter," said Wild, without replying to the question asked him, "but, then, such a simple matter as that was not likely to baffle me. I sought till I found."

"Till you found?"

"Yes."

"But where did you find?"

"Don't be impatient."

"Jonathan Wild, I do not believe you; if you really had found the papers you would answer me."

"Oh! should I?" said Jonathan, mockingly.

"Oh! this suspenseful torture is horrible," groaned the prisoner. "Oh! that I knew the truth, and then I should know what to expect. Tell me, tell me."

"Do not excite yourself."

"Excite myself! Jonathan Wild, you must be a demon, though the shape you wear is human."

"Ha! ha!"

"I say you are a demon; if you were not, you could not contemplate, unmoved, such sufferings as mine are."

"You repent now, do you not, that you refused the offer I made you on the occasion of my last visit? If you had taken it you would have been at liberty by this time. Fool that you were, that when you saw a chance of achieving your freedom you did not embrace it. Now, that chance is gone."

"No, no; I will not believe it—at least, not without some further proof than your bare allegation."

"You might as well do so. I speak the truth."

"I should believe you if you would tell me where the papers were found."

"Your belief is immaterial; you can do just as you like. I say I have the papers, and you have no longer anything to offer that will induce me to set you at liberty."

"I cannot believe it. I took such pains, and gave such strict injunctions."

"I know you did."

"How? You know?"

"Yes. You little thought I should peruse the pretty little superscription you had written upon them."

The prisoner stared aghast.

Up to this moment he had cheated himself into the belief that Wild was trying to impose upon him.

His last speech, however, he well knew, indicated a knowledge of them, if nothing more.

"You have found them, then?" he gasped.

"Of course I have. I went first to your town mansion in Piccadilly, and searched it in vain—at least, not altogether in vain, for I found there a letter from a certain lawyer in the Temple. It was a letter about a mortgage, but it served to put me on the right scent. Do you believe me now, Abel, eh?"

A cold sweat had burst forth upon the brow of the unfortunate Lord Donnnull, and hung there in clustering beads.

His whole frame trembled, and he seemed in imminent danger of falling.

No longer could he delude himself with the idea that the papers were undiscovered; and yet, with the pertinacity of despair, he clung to the idea that Jonathan was deceiving him.

The thief-taker, however, went on.

"When I had once got that address the rest was simple. It is scarcely necessary to mention the name of the lawyer, but, as you seem so very hard of belief, I will do so. It is William Mudford, and his offices are in Pump-court, Temple. I went there, and found the packet of papers in a tin box containing other documents relating to the Donnnull family. You may be sure I lost no time in taking possession of such important papers. I was rather amused with that superscription of yours—it was so like you. Not content with confessing your own crimes, you must needs implicate me, and try to get my neck into the halter. However, that danger is past, so it does not matter. You don't look so well as you did a little while ago, my friend."

Every word of this last speech fell like repeated blows upon the heart of Abel Donnnull.

Jonathan had found the papers.

His words proved it.

All was now lost, and a deep groan came from his overcharged breast.

He had relied upon those papers as being the means of preserving his life; but now all was over: they were in the possession of Jonathan Wild, and he was wholly in his power.

These were terrible thoughts to have, and he glanced apprehensively at the darkening countenance of his foe.

What hope had he of mercy from such a man?

He shuddered, and resigned himself to the worst.

He leaned heavily against the wall.

Without its support he would have fallen.

He glanced, once more, furtively into the countenance of the thief-taker.

It wore a still more ominous expression.

The truth was, Jonathan Wild was tired of playing with his victim, and was contemplating the delivery of the last stroke.

Abel Donnnull knew his danger, and a scream came from his lips.

It was the first which struck upon the ears of Jack Sheppard.

He knew the danger of his position.

Now he would be nothing but an incumbrance to Wild, and the hated possessor of many dangerous secrets.

His death, then, would be most desirable.

Now that Wild had got the papers, what was to hinder him from taking it?

Nothing; but, at the same time that he came to this conclusion, he resolved not to suffer his life to be taken from him without making at least an effort to protect it.

He would sell it dearly.

As these thoughts swept through his brain with the velocity of the whirlwind, they suggested others.

A hope of escape presented itself to his view.

Jonathan Wild was there—within his reach—and off his guard.

Would it not be possible for him to spring forward with great suddenness, and cause the thief-taker such surprise as to render him incapable of resistance until he had got the mastery of him.

He thought so; and, as soon as the thought occurred to him, he proceeded to put it into execution, for he well

knew that his position was most desperate, and that prompt measures could alone avail him.

All would depend upon his being able to take his adversary by surprise.

Of a truth, the thought of his prisoner making an attack upon him never once entered Wild's mind.

Excitement, and the hope of making his escape, not only from horrible captivity, but perhaps speedy death, endowed Abel Donnull with fictitious strength sufficient for his purpose.

Turning swiftly round, he bounded forwards.

He had calculated his distance correctly before he took his spring, and his fingers grasped Wild tightly by the throat.

He felt them there, and, with the frenzy of a maniac, buried his vulture-like claws in his flesh.

Jonathan was taken by surprise.

So astonished was he that he dropped the torch, which, however, was not extinguished.

It smouldered on the ground, and diffused a faint light over the cell.

But Wild quickly recovered from his astonishment—long before his prisoner had time to obtain any decided advantage over him.

A horrible imprecation came from his lips.

Then he commenced a struggle.

But he was astonished at the strength of his adversary.

It was the strength of a maniac.

By an exertion of the tremendous muscular power which he possessed, Jonathan freed himself from his grasp, and forced Abel down on to the ground.

Then, releasing him with the quickness of thought, he sought in his pockets for the short, thick bludgeon, which he invariably carried with him.

To grasp it was the work of a moment.

Just then Abel Donnull struggled to his knees.

Uttering a fiendish yell, Jonathan raised the bludgeon in the air, and brought it down with terrific force.

Abel saw it coming.

He cried for mercy, and put up his hands to ward off the blow.

In vain.

The heavy bludgeon descended upon his head with a sickening crash! Another and another blow followed, and then Abel Donnull lay upon the floor of the cell with his skull completely beaten in.

CHAPTER CCCXI.

JACK SHEPPARD ASSURES HIMSELF OF THE DEPARTURE OF THE THIEF-TAKER, AND THEN MAKES HIS WAY INTO BLUESKIN'S CELL.

SUCH was the explanation of the awful shrieks which Jack had heard, and which he rightly enough imagined came from some one in his death agony.

Occupied as Jonathan was, it is not at all surprising that the slight noise Jack made in his excitement should have failed to reach his ears.

Little did Jack think from whom those shrieks proceeded, and that Edgworth Bess had one enemy less in the world.

At least, towards the last, Abel Donnull could scarcely be called her enemy.

He had repented of what he had done, and was desirous of making reparation.

It was this which sealed his death-warrant.

Had he continued to be the same as he was, Jonathan would have permitted him to live much longer yet, for he would have been of great service to him in the execution of his plans.

Now he was better dead.

Jack heard Wild close the door of the cell and lock it.

He heard him go a few paces and then pause.

For what purpose he knew not, without it was that he was pondering as to the cause of the noise which Jack had so incautiously made.

Whether this was so or not, Jonathan eventually continued on his way to the staircase leading up to the house.

For many minutes after all sounds had died away Jack continued to listen.

He knew the cunning and craft of his old enemy, and if he suspected anything he would be sure to go away in

such a manner that his departure could not fail to be noticed, and then return with the utmost stealthiness.

It was prudent, then, for Jack to act as he did, and not risk all by any precipitate movement.

It was a hard trial upon his patience, for he was anxious, in the extreme, to let Blueskin know that he was so close at hand.

It was important, too, that as little time should be lost as possible.

Jack was full of anxiety as to the fate of Edgworth Bess, and he longed that himself and his friend were at liberty and searching for her.

Indeed, this was a point upon which he could not reflect, and he was compelled to banish the idea as much as possible from his mind.

To do this, he turned his thoughts upon his present situation.

All was still.

Jonathan Wild had, as he firmly believed, left the precincts of the cell.

Having come to this conclusion, he removed his ear from the door—against which it had been tightly pressed while he was listening.

As he did so, a faint groan came from the adjoining cell.

It went to his heart, for he was well enough aware that it was no ordinary suffering that would have the effect of wringing such a sound from Blueskin's lips.

He started to his feet—for he had been kneeling down—and made his way towards that wall which divided him from his companion.

In a low voice, he uttered the one word—

"Blueskin!"

It must have been heard, for a sudden clanking of chains and rustling of straw took place.

Again Jack pronounced the name.

"Who spoke?" asked a hollow voice. "Who spoke? Surely I am mad, or dreaming."

"Hush! do not speak so loud."

"Again that familiar voice. Oh! heaven, can it be possible?"

"Hush—hush! Be silent, or we shall be overheard. It is I—Jack Sheppard."

"Impossible!"

"No—no. I am here; here to effect your release."

"Where are you? Is it some cheat? I hear your voice plainly enough; where are you?"

"It is no cheat," replied Jack. "I am here in the next cell."

"In the next cell?"

"Yes."

"You, then, are a prisoner like myself. By what means has Jonathan got you into his power, and where is Edgworth Bess?"

"Not so fast with your questions, my friend," said Jack. "Wait a few moments; I will tell you all, presently."

"Why not now?"

"Because I want to make my way into your cell first."

"But how can you do that? It will take you a long time. You will find these walls formidable obstacles, even if you have proper tools to pierce them."

"Wait a bit," said Jack, "and you will see how I am going to manage it. It is not such a difficult matter as you seem to think."

"What are you about to do?"

"Are you not aware that just where the wall of the cell joins the ceiling there is a small square aperture, designed for the purpose of ventilation, and that it is in consequence of this that you can hear me speak so plainly?"

"Yes, I am well aware of all that."

"Very well, then, it is through that aperture I intend to make my way into your cell."

"Impossible!"

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you it is impossible."

"We will see about that."

"When Wild had those holes made," continued Blueskin, "he took care to have them so made as to prevent all possibility of a prisoner getting through them."

"Well, you will see. Here I come!"

As he spoke, Jack Sheppard gave a spring upwards, and caught hold of the edge of the square opening with his fingers.

This is what he had done on the former occasion; and, having obtained a hold with the ends of his fingers, he had, by the muscular power in his arms, drawn himself up until he could get a firmer grasp.

This he attempted to do in the present instance.

But he failed.

His fingers gave way, and refused to support the weight of his body.

He was compelled to drop to the ground.

He forgot that on the former occasion he was possessed of his full strength, and could perform such a feat easily.

Now, however, the case was entirely different.

He was worn out and exhausted by the want of sufficient food and rest, and by almost superhuman exertions.

His heart fluttered painfully when he saw how his strength failed him.

He did not hurt himself when he dropped to the ground, for the distance was but short.

His failure, however, did not dishearten him.

Indeed, it seemed to have an altogether contrary effect. Convinced that he had not enough strength to pull himself up by the assistance of his arms alone, he endeavoured to find something that would aid him in his ascent.

A rapid search round the cell showed him that there was nothing there of a portable character that was likely to answer his purpose.

Then a fresh idea struck him.

With the aid of the strong blade of his clasp-knife, he should easily be able to pick out sufficient mortar between two of the stones to enable him to thrust his toe into the crevice, and so mount by this means.

No sooner did this thought strike him, than he set about trying to carry it into effect.

Blueskin inquired anxiously what he was about, and Jack at once explained his difficulty.

He attacked the mortar with his clasp-knife vigorously, and soon had the satisfaction of perceiving that he made rapid progress, and that he should soon have a crevice large enough for his toes to be inserted in it.

He worked away with right good will.

The mortar was soft, owing to the continual damp, and a tolerable space was left between each of the stones.

At length he ceased his labour.

He restored his clasp-knife to his pocket, and, summoning all his strength, gave a spring upwards once more.

Again he succeeded in obtaining a hold, and this time he was able to retain it, because his feet had something to rest upon.

By another effort he succeeded in thrusting his head and shoulders through the small square aperture.

He was now all right, and, stimulated by his success, forced himself still further through.

A dim kind of twilight pervaded Blueskin's cell, which would have been utter darkness for anyone who had not been immured in it for some time.

By the aid of this, however, Jack was just able to distinguish the figure of Blueskin lying on the ground.

The weight of his fetters, and the weakness produced by his wound, prevented him from rising.

"Do you not find the hole too small for you to force yourself through it?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Jack, in as cheerful a voice as he could assume; "when Jonathan contrived this, he did not reckon upon having a prisoner as slender as I am."

"Come to me, Jack, if you can. I am unable to come to you or assist you in any way."

"Cheer up," said Jack. "I shall be able to manage without your help, I have no doubt."

As he spoke these words, Jack strove to force himself through.

But this he found a by no means easy task.

Had there been some one on the other side who could have caught hold of his arms and pulled him down he could have managed well enough, but as it was his position was a very awkward one.

By slow degrees he wriggled himself through, however; but in the end he was compelled to drop rather awkwardly to the ground.

But he did not mind that in the least.

He was on his feet again, and by the side of Blueskin, in a moment.

The greeting between the two friends was a warm one,

and each was impatient to hear from the other an account of what had happened since the separation.

They talked rapidly for some time, but, as all the events about which they spoke have already been set down in their proper place, it is needless for us to place the particulars of their conversation before the reader.

They did not cease until Blueskin had told Jack all that had befallen him since the moment of their parting in the ruined farmhouse, and until Jack had told Blueskin all that had happened to himself since the same period.

As the reader may suppose, from the immense number of incidents, this mutual relation consumed a great deal of time.

Blueskin was especially concerned when he was told of the mysterious disappearance of Edgworth Bess.

It seemed to have the effect of inspiring him with fresh strength, for he felt all the importance of at once effecting his release.

On the other hand, Jack could not help feeling alarmed at finding Blueskin in so grievous and dangerous a state.

At length a perfect and thorough understanding was arrived at, and they proceeded to talk over their future actions.

Jack Sheppard was in a sinking state for want of food, and inquired of Blueskin whether he was supplied with any.

He was replied to in the affirmative, but at the same time informed that the supplies came very irregularly.

At the present moment there was no food, of any description, in the cell, for the rats had devoured the remains.

Jack then bethought himself of the provisions he had had the forethought to place in his pockets.

The quantity was but small, and half was already eaten.

Still he took out what was left, and, dividing it into two equal portions, gave one to Blueskin and took one himself.

He also produced a flask which contained a small quantity of spirit, and of this he partook equally with his companion.

After their meal Jack felt much better, and he at once proclaimed his readiness to set about attempting to effect his release.

CHAPTER CCCXII.

JACK SHEPPARD RELIEVES BLUESKIN FROM HIS FETTERS, AND IMMEDIATELY SETS ABOUT ATTEMPTING TO ESCAPE.

"BUT, Jack," said Blueskin, "have you any idea whether it is day or night? If it is the former, it will be very injudicious to take any steps."

Jack passed his hand over his forehead, and strove to recollect whether it was day or night.

"But he was unable to speak with precision.

The swoon into which he had fallen upon first making his way into the cell, and of the duration of which he could form no idea, baffled him entirely.

He racked his brain for some time to no purpose, and was at length compelled to give up the attempt in despair.

"We must run our risk, Blueskin," he said, "whether it is day or night; for if my life depended upon it I cannot tell you, and it is just as likely to be one as the other."

"True; and yet I wish we could ascertain. The point is such an important one."

"I admit that; but can you see any means of doing so?"

"Alas! no. I can think of none."

"Cheer up! my friend," said Jack. "You must not speak so despondingly as that, or we shall never do anything, you may depend."

"It is my weakness and my wounds."

"I know your sufferings must be great."

"These fetters!" said Blueskin, "they weigh me down!"

"Pardon me, my friend," said Jack. "I had forgotten them. Our first step towards escape must be the removal of them. Fortunately, I have the means of freeing you from such an encumbrance."

As he spoke, Jack drew forth his file.

A gleam of hope and joy irradiated Blueskin's heart.

Jack commenced filing vigorously at the fetters.

The iron of which they were composed, though heavy, was soft, and the file sank into it as it would into wood, for its teeth were sharp, and the steel of which it was made well tempered.

"Have you another file, Jack?" asked Blueskin, who had viewed his companion's proceedings with the utmost satisfaction. "If you have, fear not that I shall be able to make use of it; and that will reduce the length of your task somewhat."

"I have only this one file," said Jack, pausing for a moment in his work, "and if I had another, I don't think I should let you make use of it."

"Why not?"

"You will have need of all the strength you can muster when the eventful moment comes."

"I know it."

"It won't be the easiest matter in the world to walk out of here, I can tell you."

"I know that, too."

"Very well, then; while I am at work at these fetters, do you listen with all the ears you have got, and warn me in time should anyone be approaching."

"Right; I will do so. But, Jack!"

"What?"

"Suppose someone was to enter this cell while you were here; what would you do?"

"Well, I hardly know."

"The point deserves attention, for someone is almost sure to come."

"We must wait till then," said Jack, carelessly, "and rely upon our good luck. You can think it over if you like, but mind you don't forget to listen."

And, speaking these words, Jack resumed his task of filing the fetters.

It was astonishing to see what progress he made.

He did not, however, file through one thoroughly, but left it secured by a thin piece, which he could sever in a moment.

In this manner he did them all.

The motive was an obvious one.

Should anyone enter the cell before he had completed his task, their suspicions would not be so likely to be aroused.

They were, however, left completely undisturbed.

Although Jack worked with such speed and energy, the fetters were of so complicated a description that a very long time elapsed before he completed his task.

He was filing away at the last link, when Blueskin's quick ear detected a slight sound in the corridor without.

He informed Jack of it, who ceased instantly and listened too.

The slight sound was developed into a footstep.

Jack's position was now critical.

To return to the cell he had, with so much trouble, left, he looked upon as an impossibility.

Should a visit to Blueskin's cell be intended, he was certain he could never squeeze himself through the small aperture in time to avoid detection.

What, then, was to be done? for, if he remained, and anyone entered, his discovery appeared to be inevitable.

The prisoners were able to hear with great distinctness all that took place in the corridor without, in consequence of the opening above the door, which we have frequently had occasion to describe.

It was through this that a faint, dim light found its way into Blueskin's cell.

As both listened they could distinguish the footsteps of two persons.

They heard them pause, and the door opened.

"They are going their rounds to supply the prisoners with food. Conceal yourself, or we are lost, for my cell is sure to be visited."

"We shall be found, not lost, I think," muttered Jack.

"How am I to conceal myself in this cell?" he added, in a louder voice.

"I know not, I know not," replied Blueskin. "I fear all is over with us."

"Do not despair, my friend. Even if they entered, the chances are a thousand to one the cell will not be examined, and, as a natural consequence, my presence will pass unnoticed."

"Betake yourself to the most obscure corner," said Blueskin.

"I shall do that, you may depend," replied Jack.

"Hark! they come!"

The footsteps sounded nearer.

Various other cell-doors were undone and quickly fas-

tened again, which confirmed Blueskin's statement about the prisoners being supplied with food.

Few words passed between the two persons, whoever they were.

At length they paused before Blueskin's cell.

Now was the anxious moment.

Jack Sheppard glided towards that corner of the cell which would be concealed by the door when opened, and screwed himself as close as he possibly could against the wall.

Blueskin lay down upon the straw as though insensible or sleeping.

A key rattled in the lock of the door, and then a voice said—

"This is Blueskin's cell, Mr. Wild. Shall I leave anything here?"

A pause ensued, which was presently broken by the voice of the thief-taker.

"No, curse you!" he said. "Who told you to put your key in that lock?"

"I thought, Mr. Wild!"

"What business have you to think, villain?"

The man submissively removed the key.

"No," continued Wild, speaking in a very loud voice, "you will leave no provisions in that cell until you have further orders from me."

"Very good, Mr. Wild."

"You are not even to open the door of this cell without I am with you and give you instructions to do so. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly well," replied the janizary, whose voice was a strange one both to Jack and Blueskin. "I understand you perfectly well, and you can rely upon my faithfully carrying out all your instructions."

"Above all, see that you obey me in this," said the thief-taker; "and now follow me."

As he spoke these words, Jonathan strode away from the spot.

Jack drew a long breath of relief when he thought of the danger he had been fortunate enough to escape.

He did not venture to utter a word, however, while Wild was anywhere within the precincts of the cells, for he did not know how far his voice would be carried.

Blueskin, too, remained perfectly silent, doubtless for the very same reason, though, perhaps, he was better aware of the danger of carrying on a conversation in one of the cells while Jonathan Wild was at hand than even Jack was.

It seemed a weary time to them while Jonathan and the janizary went the round of the cells, but at length they heard the welcome sound of their returning footsteps.

They passed the door, and at length silence once more reigned in that gloomy region.

In a faint voice, Jack spoke.

"Well, Blueskin," he said, affecting to make light of their dangerous position, "what do you think of that?"

"Of what?"

"Of Jonathan's kind intentions towards you."

"Oh I understand all that. I am rather surprised he should have tried such a thing upon me."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that conversation that took place outside the door was a planned affair, and intended as a means of intimidation."

"Oh I indeed."

"Jonathan spoke like that on purpose. He wanted me to overhear his instructions, and understand that it was his design to accomplish my death by starvation. I should, doubtless, be kept without food for a considerable length of time in order to give colour to it, and then he would pay me a visit, and renew his infamous proposals to me."

"You seem to understand him pretty well."

"And so I ought to, after knowing him for the length of time I have, and after having had so many opportunities of studying his character."

"True! true!" said Jack; "I see it now plain enough. He would calculate upon that little bit of conversation making a deep impression on your mind."

"And it would be admirably calculated to do so, were I less well acquainted with the motives that actuated him."

"Just so. But, Blueskin, I tell you what it is—the

sooner we get out of this place, the better. It is evident you will have nothing given you to eat at present; and therefore, the longer we stay, the less able we shall be to achieve our escape."

"Exactly," replied Blueskin. "I should not recommend you to delay another moment. But how are you to get that door open? It is very strongly secured."

"Leave the door to me," said Jack, "I'll manage it; but I think the best thing I can do, is to free you altogether from your fetters."

"I shall be very glad to be released from them, for in my present state their weight is more than I can sustain without enduring great fatigue."

"Well, I don't think we need fear another visit just at present."

"Certainly not."

"All right, then. For before the time comes round for them to pay another, I trust we shall be far away."

"So do I, with all my heart."

Without any further delay Jack now proceeded to file through Blueskin's fetters; and this task, owing to the effective manner in which the former part of his labour was accomplished, occupied but an incredibly short space of time.

One by one the ponderous links were removed, and then Blueskin once more, thanks to the exertions of his friend, was unshackled.

Feeling his body relieved of the intolerable weight which pressed him down, he felt that already no inconsiderable step had been taken in the direction of freedom.

Much, however, yet remained to be done; but Jack had confidence in his own powers, and he at once made his way to the door, which was the chief obstacle he would have to overcome—for, after passing through it, the remainder would be comparatively easy.

CHAPTER CCCXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD MAKES HIS WAY INTO THE PASSAGE, AND ENCOUNTERS WILD AND HIS MYRMIDONS.

THERE are, however, few, we venture to affirm, who would have looked upon that door with the same amount of easy indifference that Jack did.

Its massive strength seemed to set at defiance all efforts which might be made to force it.

Indeed, it had been specially constructed to render such a thing impossible; and the reader may be sure that Jonathan took the utmost care that Blueskin should be perfectly secure.

Oh! how astonished and incredulous the great thief-taker would have been if, when he stood at the door of the cell, someone had whispered in his ear that Jack Sheppard was within it, as well as Blueskin!

But Jonathan was not destined to receive any such intimation; and, as we have seen, he took his departure in ignorance.

A little more light would have been of infinite service to Jack in the task he was about to commence; but, as that was out of the question, he forbore to think about it.

Carefully Jack felt the door with his hands, before he attempted to make any attack upon it.

He found the bolt of the lock shot into a small place in the stonework, provided specially for its reception.

Now, could this stone be removed, he thought that would be at once the quickest and easiest way of getting the door open.

He resolved to make the attempt.

The success he had already met with in using the clasp-knife, encouraged him to persevere in the use of it.

Again taking it from his pocket, he opened the blade, and with it began, in just the same manner as before, to pick away the mortar.

Here, however, he found his task much more difficult, for the wall was tolerably dry, and the mortar consequently firm.

Still, the keen edge of the clasp-knife soon made an impression upon it.

Little by little did the crumbled mortar fall down upon the floor of the dungeon.

Jack worked with a speed and industry remarkable to a degree.

In less time than even his companion Blueskin considered possible, he had loosened the stone so much that he could move it backwards and forwards, and almost draw it out.

Success inspired him with fresh vigour, and more mortar came away before the sharp point of the knife.

At length the stone came away in his hands, when he drew it towards him.

So far, then, all was well.

But though the door was no longer secured by the lock, it still remained firm and immovable.

There were the massive bolts, and there was the heavy bar of iron.

Both these formidable securements had to be removed. Unweariedly Jack continued with his task.

The heavy drops of perspiration fell from his brow like tears, but he heeded not this proof of the exertions he was making.

He continued his efforts.

He first set to work upon the iron bar.

It was lucky he knew the exact manner in which these were put up, because it rendered his task all the easier in devising a means whereby he could take it down.

He still made use of his clasp-knife.

Inserting the blade between the door and the stone wall, which served for a door-post, he moved it up and down until he encountered the bar.

Then, putting forth his utmost strength, he raised the handle of the knife, and strove to lift the bar from its setting.

For a long time he was unsuccessful, for it fitted into the staples provided for its reception tightly.

At length, however, he felt it yield to the upward pressure which he applied to it.

He put forth his utmost strength.

It went still higher.

Again he tried, and this time the blade of the knife slipped in some inexplicable manner, and the iron bar descended to its former position.

Jack gave utterance to an impotent curse.

Rendered passionate by the defeat, he put forth redoubled strength.

Up went the bar, and the next moment it fell with a clang upon the stone flooring of the corridor.

This was something they had not foreseen, and Jack and Blueskin felt their blood suddenly congeal to ice upon hearing the frightful sound, which, they doubted not, would reach the ears of some of thief-taker's myrmidons.

However, it would never do to hesitate, and Jack commenced an attack upon the bolts with the frenzy of desperation.

But they were firm, and of themselves sufficient security for any door—no matter how strong.

But they could not stand against Jack's file.

This was thin and sharp.

He was now easily able to introduce it between the door and the wall, and he worked it backwards and forwards with great rapidity.

At each stroke he could feel the file sink deeper and deeper into the soft iron.

At length it was severed.

Exultant, Jack turned towards the one remaining bolt.

When he had filed through that, the door would swing open upon its hinges.

Under such circumstances, who would not apply himself to work with redoubled ardour?

What Jack performed was really incredible.

In less than half the time the first had taken the second bolt was sawn through.

With a beating heart, he pushed against the door.

It swung open.

In the twinkling of an eye, he was in the corridor.

Turning round instantly, he assisted Blueskin up the somewhat steep steps leading from the cells.

But now a fresh and quite unexpected danger awaited them.

The bar, the fall of which, Jack fondly hoped, had been productive of no alarm, had, on the contrary, aroused the attention of the man whose duty it was to keep guard at the grating.

It was night; and, as usual, he was in a half-slumbering state.

The falling bar awoke him, but he did not know exactly what it was.

He paused and listened.

But all was still; for the noise Jack made with the file was too slight to reach so great a distance.

Unsatisfied, and confident that something unusual had taken place—and dreading, too, the punishment he would surely meet with for any neglect of duty—he rose to his feet, unfastened the grating, and crept down the steps.

Upon reaching the foot of them, the grinding of the file struck upon his ears.

He jumped to a conclusion respecting what was taking place.

Some prisoners were endeavouring to escape.

Back to the hall he went with the rapidity of thought.

He whispered a few words to the man on the lock, and then darted up the stairs to Wild's room.

Jonathan and his son—outwardly better friends than ever—were sitting one on each side of the fireplace, smoking, and indulging in occasional conversation.

Two words sufficed to acquaint Wild with the state of affairs.

He started to his feet with an oath, and seized a huge, heavy sword, which he had unbuckled from his waist before he set down, and placed in a little nook by the side of the fireplace.

Wild, junior, also snatched up a brace of pistols, and the three made their way with full speed down the stairs.

Upon reaching the bottom, Jonathan called to the man on the lock to follow them, as he was the only janizary on duty and ready for immediate service.

Through the iron grating they passed in a dense throng, so dense as somewhat as impede each other's progress.

When about half-way down the steps, they were able to see the full length of the passage, and, to the unutterable consternation of Jonathan Wild, who should he see emerge from a cell, but Jack Sheppard.

At first he stood aghast, unable to credit the avouch of his own eyes.

He glared at him.

He saw him raise Blueskin from the cell.

Jonathan Wild now uttered a shout.

He could not have stifled it had his life depended upon his doing so.

It reached the ears of our two friends, and let them know the danger with which they were menaced.

They were on their guard instantly.

The thief-taker dashed down the few remaining steps with the disregard for personal safety which characterizes the conduct of a maniac.

His son and the two janizaries, who were all greatly excited, followed him closely.

Jonathan made sure he had his prey in his grasp, and he felt exultant accordingly.

He felt sure it was impossible for them to escape, and that, though they might resist, he should be sure of them in the end.

He forgot the very important circumstance that the secret of the outlet into the yard was known to Jack Sheppard.

Indeed, it was so long since he had had any occasion to make use of it, that he had almost forgotten its existence.

It was not, therefore, to be surprised at, that, though they were free from their cells, he considered them quite as much his prisoners.

"Yield—yield!" he shouted, "or I will fire and be the death of you!"

To this speech Jack and Blueskin paid not the least attention, but made their way along the passage to the first secret door leading to the second series of cells.

Jack Sheppard knew not the means by which this was opened, but, fortunately for their safety, Blueskin did.

He pressed upon the spring, and the door flew open instantly.

They were through it with a speed and celerity really marvellous.

Upon seeing this, a yell of furious rage came from Jonathan's lips.

Our friends did not hear the whole of it.

It was abruptly cut short by Jack, who, as soon as they had gained the inner passage, swung the door shut after him.

It closed with a sharp snap.

They did not pause, however, for they were well aware this would be only a momentary check, for Jonathan would, of course, know how to press upon the spring.

Nevertheless, it was a slight advantage.

Without slackening his speed, Jack ran to the end of this second passage, to where the stone was which would enable them to reach the yard above.

Of this Blueskin was in ignorance until Jack had informed him of it in the course of the conversation they had had with each other in the dungeon.

Just as they gained this stone, the other secret door was dashed open with terrific violence, and the gigantic form of the thief-taker and his adherents appeared at it.

Upon seeing what Jack was about, his rage knew no bounds, and the absolute frenzy of a madman took possession of him.

CHAPTER CCCXIV.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN SUCCEED IN REACHING NEWGATE-MARKET, BUT JONATHAN WILD FOLLOWS HARD UPON THEIR TRACK.

THE situation of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard was now desperate in the extreme, and nothing would save them from death or capture but the adoption of some mode of action, the daring and boldness of which would be commensurate with the occasion.

The first secret door through which Wild was making his way was narrow, and it was impossible for more than one to pass through it at a time.

Jonathan's bulky form now occupied the opening.

Close behind him, standing in a dense throng, were the two janizaries, and Wild, junior.

This gave Jack an idea.

It flashed across his mind the moment he turned round, which Jonathan's frightful yell had involuntarily compelled him to do.

He saw the position of his enemies, crowded together as though in a tube.

Quick as thought, he drew a brace of loaded pistols from his pocket, cocked them, and fired both at once.

The scene of confusion which followed can be imagined.

In that confined space, it was impossible for the bullets to be harmless.

On the contrary, they must, of necessity, be terribly destructive.

Another yell came from the lips of the thief-taker, but its character was altogether different to those which he had previously uttered.

It was one of pain.

It was echoed by other cries from his rear, for the two pistol shots had done frightful execution.

Jack Sheppard did not, however, wait to see this.

As soon as the pistols were fired, he turned towards the stone that opened upon the steps.

He pressed upon the spring.

The stone revolved.

The steps were disclosed.

Jack stood aside.

"Mount, Blueskin!" he said, urgently. "Mount, and be quick for your life."

Our old friend did not want to be told twice, but dashed through the small opening.

Jack followed as closely as was practicable, and pulled the stone sharply after him.

He had the satisfaction of hearing the spring go snap, which assured him it was fastened.

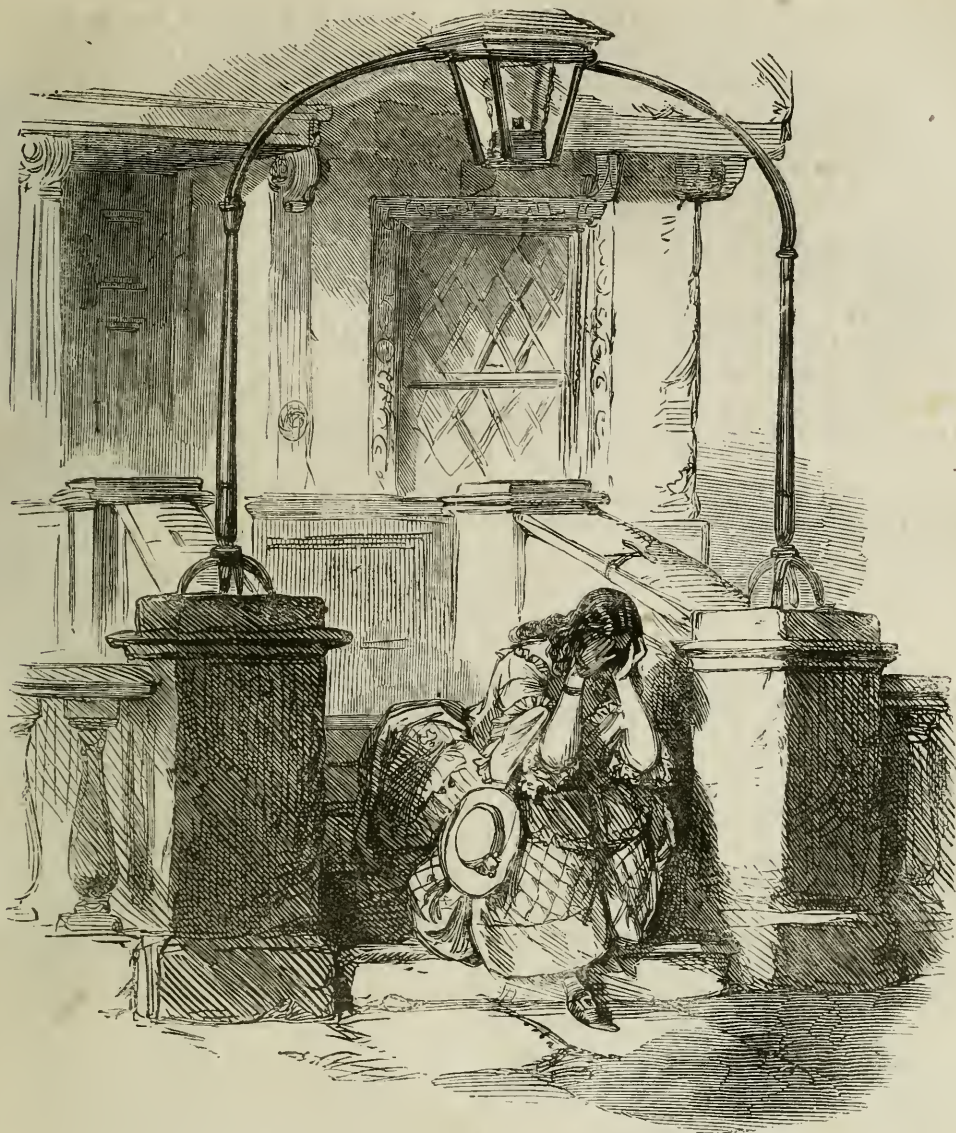
This staircase was profoundly dark, and Blueskin had to grope up it in the best manner he could.

He struck himself several times against projecting portions of the masonry, but such trifling accidents as these he took no notice of.

The reader will recollect that, when Jack Sheppard passed through the square opening in the yard, he had restored the movable stone to its ordinary position, being confident of his power to raise it when the proper moment came.

It would have been running a risk to have left it open, for he could not have told who might come into the yard, though, at the same time, he was aware that the thief-taker made but little use of his back premises.

Ascending the steps, then, which were spiral, Blueskin, not knowing how high he had to go, struck his head a rather sharp blow against this stone, and then came to a sudden halt.



[EDGORTH BESS SUCCUMBS TO EXHAUSTION AND DESPAIR.]

Jack, who guessed what had happened, told him to remain still while he passed him.

Owing to the narrowness of the staircase, this was a difficult matter.

Jack's body was small, however, and he managed it.

He found that it required all his strength to lift the stone.

He succeeded in raising it, however, and slipped through.

He held the stone up while Blueskin followed him.

Having reached so far in safety, they paused to listen.

A confused noise came from below.

Jack was about to place the stone slab in its proper place when a fresh thought struck him.

He communicated it to Blueskin, whose approval was immediate.

By their joint strength they raised the stone completely from its setting.

They then turned it until they held it cornerwise over the staircase.

Then they let go.

It dropped with a tremendous crash upon the steps, and effectually blocked up the passage.

Jack and Blueskin were now quite confident that Wild and his followers could not make their way by that means into the yard.

They would have to return along the passage, ascend the steps leading up into the hall, and reach the yard by means of the back-door.

This gave our friends time.

It was very necessary.

There was the door to open, which led out into Newgate-market, and he could not tell until he tried what trouble he should have in doing so.

He now at once made his way towards it.

For a moment, however, we will return to the proceedings of Jonathan Wild, who was quite impressed with the notion that he had his prisoners in a kind of trap, from which they could not escape.

Their passing so readily through the first secret door was the first thing that staggered him in his belief.

He increased his speed, and shouted to those who followed to keep close behind him.

The secret spring was, of course, well known to Wild.

He pressed upon it, and the door swung open.

Then, to his unutterable horror, he saw Jack in the act of removing the stone which led to the staircase, the existence of which he fondly hoped was known only to himself.

At the moment he did not recollect that Jack Sheppard had once before made his way into the cells by that means.

It was this discovery which caused him to utter the dreadful yell.

Then, before he could fairly gain the inner passage, Jack Sheppard fired the brace of pistols.

Wild uttered a howl.

He felt himself hit.

He staggered a pace or two, and then, throwing his arms about him in a strange manner, fell gasping to the ground.

His cry of pain was echoed by Wild, junior; for he, too, was hit, but not severely.

The bullet which had struck his father, wounded him also on the cheek, along which it made a deep furrow and took off a piece of the lower part of his ear in its progress.

The other bullet struck the man who had charge of the grating, full in the chest, and he fell back dead without uttering a groan, carrying in his fall his companion with him.

Wild, junior, was the only one out of the four who kept his feet, and he gave vent to a volley of curses that would have done credit to his parent.

The unhurt janizary was the first to struggle to his feet.

Jonathan followed.

He was by far more frightened than hurt.

The bullet had struck him slightly on the head, and produced a momentary insensibility.

At first he thought he was killed, but he quickly recovered from his panic.

He had dropped his sword when he fell, and now, taking it up once more, he rushed up the steps.

A faint gleam of light came down from the night-sky, and to this circumstance was Jonathan indebted for escaping a sudden and violent contact with the stone Jack and Blueskin dropped down.

As it so happened, he saw it in time to save himself from any injury.

He comprehended in an instant what had been done.

He made no attempt to remove the stone, for he well knew that all his efforts would be futile.

He turned round swiftly, determined to reach the yard as quickly as possible by the other route.

As he hastened along, he called out to his son and made him aware of what had happened, and ordered him to follow.

George—whose blood was up, and who, on such occasions, resembled his rascally parent more than he did at any other time—did not need twice bidding.

The janizary brought up the rear.

Wild shouted out his instructions to him.

"Run to the stables," he said, "and get ready horses and men. Take them round into Warwick-lane at once."

Upon reaching the hall, Jonathan was pleased to find that several of his men, aroused by the tremendous tumult, had assembled there.

He waved his sword, and, in a shrieking tone of voice, called to them to follow him.

They obeyed.

He led the way to the back of the house, and dashed open the door that led into the yard.

So expeditious had he been in his movements that Jack and Blueskin had only just left the yard.

We now revert to them.

Upon reaching the door, the first thing that attracted Jack's notice was, that there were a couple of bolts at the top and bottom of the door.

He had some difficulty in withdrawing them, for they had got completely rusted into their sockets.

At length, however, he succeeded.

But the door did not then yield.

It was still further secured by means of a ponderous lock.

How this was to be undone in the time seemed a mystery.

But Jack set to work with a good heart.

Taking the file out of his pocket, he endeavoured to force back the bolt of the lock with the point of it.

But, so far from succeeding, he only deprived himself of a useful tool, for, in bending it, he broke it in the middle.

With the largest fragment he renewed his attempt.

This time he succeeded.

The bolt flew back with a snap.

The door now gave way before the pressure which they applied to it.

They passed through, and found themselves in the long dark passage leading into Newgate-market.

It was just at this moment that Jonathan Wild reached the yard.

He was, indeed, fearfully close upon their track, and the perils of the escaping prisoners were by no means over.

Jonathan was rendered furious by the pain of the wound he had received, and there is little doubt that, could he have overtaken Jack and Blueskin at this moment, his anger would have been so great as to render him oblivious of the refined system of revenge he had resolved to pursue in connexion with them, and would have immediately sacrificed them.

Such, however, was not to be.

Jonathan saw the open door before him, and knew in a moment that his prey had fled.

Without hesitation he entered the dark passage, and, traversing it with full speed, emerged directly afterwards into Newgate-market.

Here no trace of them could be seen.

Calculating, however, that they would make their way towards the entrance gates in Warwick-lane, he hastened in that direction.

It was here where the horses were to be.

Upon arriving at the gates, which had not yet been closed for the night—for, though it was dark, the evening was by no means far advanced—Jonathan looked eagerly up and down the street in search, not only of the fugitives, but also of the janizaries and their horses.

Of neither, however, could anything be seen.

The horses would come from the direction of Newgate-street.

This was a route he could hardly conceive the fugitives would take, and, if they did, they would be almost sure to be intercepted.

Bidding his son remain at the gateway, and leaving instructions that as soon as the horses arrived they were to mount and follow him, Wild ran with full speed down Warwick-lane in the direction of Paternoster-row.

CHAPTER CCCXV.

THE PURSUIT OF JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN BY JONATHAN WILD.

WEARY, faint, and almost overcome—the one by the weakness proceeding from his wounds, and the other from the immense amount of exertion he had undergone—Blueskin and Jack Sheppard ran, with all the speed they could possibly make, through the dark and narrow alleys of Newgate-market.

They could hear how close behind them their inveterate foe was, and the knowledge endowed them with greater fleetness than they believed possible.

They did not speak, however, because that would have involved a greater expenditure of breath than they could afford to lose.

Jack led the way towards Warwick-lane, as Wild had correctly anticipated he would.

He expected he should have to climb the gates again, and he trembled when he thought of the length of time it would necessarily take.

It was quite an agreeable surprise when he found them standing wide open.

They darted through like shadows.

The danger of going in the direction of Newgate was obvious, and so Jack turned the other way.

With much ado, Blueskin kept up with him.

Every few moments he would feel his brain swim and his legs threaten to give way beneath him.

Each time, however, that he experienced this sensation of weakness, he rallied himself by a violent effort.

But this was a state of things which could not last.

He would have to succumb ere long.

In his weak state the exercise of running was quite beyond his powers.

He lost his breath, and his heart beat with so much rapidity that he dreaded every moment it would burst.

Still he kept on.

On his part, Jack Sheppard suffered scarcely less severely.

When Wild and his men were mounted, what chance would they then have for escape?

Indeed, their position now looked worse than ever, and both were almost ready to give up in despair.

On came the thief-taker, as remorseless and un pitying as fate.

They could hear his shouts on the still night air, as he induced others to join in the chase.

Then the trampling of horses' hoofs came upon their ears.

The cattle had arrived; and Wild, junior, agreeably to his father's instructions, had mounted and followed after him.

He overtook the thief-taker in a few moments, and Jonathan mounted the spare horse that was provided for his use.

The chase was then resumed.

Jack Sheppard had been aware from the first that it would be of no use for him to try to outrun his enemy, and had made up his mind to seek shelter at the first opportunity.

But, hitherto, no chance had presented itself, nor did any now.

Jonathan was gaining on them fearfully.

Suddenly, in his headlong course, Jack observed a narrow turning, and, quick as thought, he turned down it.

His principal reason for so doing was, that the passage was impassable to horses, and his enemies would have to dismount to follow them.

This would result in the gaining of a little time.

They turned down, however, only just in time.

So close was Jonathan behind them, and so much greater was his speed than theirs, that, before they could have gone twenty yards further, they would have been overtaken.

As it was, Wild saw them turn down the narrow alley, and stopped his own horse so suddenly and unexpectedly, that he ran a narrow escape of being ridden over by those behind.

There was a slight collision.

He dismounted recklessly, and cried—

"Follow me! follow me, quickly! They are trapped at last. This place has no outlet. Follow me! We are sure to have them now!"

A triumphant sort of shout came from the desultory throng, and then they all poured down the alley.

These were dreadful words for our friends, if true; and Wild would scarcely make such a statement without having some foundation for it.

If it so happened that that particular alley, like many others in London, was so constructed as to have but one outlet, how were Blueskin and Jack Sheppard to escape?

As Jonathan had triumphantly enough said, he was sure to have them.

The statement was true.

Jack discovered it before the thief-taker spoke, and he uttered an impotent curse at his own folly for getting into such a dilemma.

The narrow turning was only a few yards in length, and there was no other outlet to it than that commanded by Wild and his gang.

With eyes almost starting from their sockets, Jack and Blueskin glared about them.

Both were utterly exhausted, and the breath came from their lungs only in short and fitful gasps.

The perspiration rolled off them in streams, and its copiousness was increased by the discovery that they had run into such a trap.

Discovery seemed inevitable.

It was just at this moment that they heard Wild shout to his men in the manner we have related.

Few men possessed a more intimate knowledge of the

streets and alleys of London, in all their ramifications, than did Jonathan Wild.

The moment he saw them go down the turning we have mentioned, he knew there was no outlet.

By the time he had finished speaking, nearly all his troop had dismounted, and followed by these, as well as by a whole troop of ragamuffins who had followed in the rear, attracted by their cries, he dashed down the alley.

The place was profoundly dark, and it was with difficulty that Wild saw about him.

The inhabitants of the locality, however, gave indications of having been aroused by the tumult.

Lights appeared at the various casements, where all had been darkness a moment before, and heads were projected, all eager to learn the cause of the disturbance.

In fact, the alarm was fast becoming general.

Paying no heed to all this, however, Jonathan Wild centred the whole of his attention upon searching the alley for our two friends.

Sword in hand, he rushed into the dark corridors, of which there were many, and made furious thrusts in the darkness.

All this was in vain.

No trace could be discovered of those he sought.

Perplexed and alarmed by this mysterious disappearance, he recommenced his search, and concluded it without coming to any other result.

Upon this, a storm of the most horrible imprecations came from his lips, and in this pleasant, edifying little amusement he was ably seconded by his son.

Cursing, however, did nothing for them.

Feeling himself impeded in his movements by those around him, Jonathan looked up and saw the alley was now densely packed with people; so from this it became quite clear that our friends were not in it, or they must have been seen by some one.

Jonathan was now forced to come to a very unwilling conclusion, and that was that his prey had sought refuge in one of the many houses which had doors opening into the court.

If this was so, and he could account in no other way for their disappearance, then his chances of capturing them were much diminished.

It would be impossible for him to say which of the houses they had entered, and, while he was searching one, they would have ample opportunities to get off if they happened to be in another.

He was thus in a state of great uncertainty, and not able to decide upon the best course of action that should be adopted.

While his indecision lasted, the fugitives were, doubtless, actively engaged in getting away.

Suddenly he thought of an expedient.

He forced his way into the middle of the crowd.

He got a couple of his janizaries to raise him above their shoulders.

Thus elevated, he was, of course, a conspicuous object.

He was seen by the whole of the dense throng, and curiosity made them for a moment silent.

Every window that looked down upon the alley was crowded with anxious faces.

They saw the thief-taker, and looked to him probably for an explanation of the hubbub—for they, too, ceased the cries which they had hitherto uttered with great volubility and power.

In a screaming voice, which seemed to pierce the ears of the whole of that vast assemblage, the thief-taker spoke.

"Friends all," he cried, "be silent for a moment, and listen to what I have to say. It is of the utmost importance that you should all hear it."

These words were well calculated to arrest the attention, and claim the silence of all present.

In a moment all was hushed.

Jonathan, perceiving the advantage he had gained, hastened to improve upon it.

"A hundred pounds!" he yelled, in even louder tones than before.

"A hundred pounds reward!—there is a hundred pounds to be earned by some of you. Listen, all, and pay attention. Two escaped prisoners ran down the court a few minutes since; I pursued them closely, but, in some way or other, they have disappeared. They must have

get into one of the houses here, and I call upon each of you, in the king's name, to search the houses in which you live. Whoever delivers the two prisoners into my hands shall receive a hundred pounds the next moment. Look about, all of you. A hundred pounds! a hundred pounds, I say!"

A scene of terrible confusion now ensued.

Wild was placed upon his feet.

The people at the windows hastily withdrew, and those in the alley swayed and surged about like the turbulent ocean.

Wild now thought he had gained his point.

It was scarcely possible, he thought, that, supposing our friends to have sought shelter in one of the houses, that they could escape being seen by some one when attention was so generally directed towards them.

Every person, in each of the houses, would become aware of what had happened, and the moment Jack and Blueskin were perceived, which, if they were in one of the houses they could scarcely fail to be, the largeness of the reward which he had offered would, he doubted not, overcome all entreaties, on the part of the fugitives, for protection.

The inhabitants of this neighbourhood were the poorest of the poor, and a hundred pounds would be, to them, almost like a colossal fortune.

All these thoughts had flashed, with the rapidity of lightning, through the brain of the thief-taker when the idea first occurred to him.

An anxious moment elapsed, during which his evil eyes roamed over the mass of ruinous buildings which surrounded the alley. Suddenly a tremendous tumult ensued, which seemed to indicate the discovery of the fugitives.

Jonathan made sure of it, and, with a loud yell of satisfaction on his lips, he forced his way through the crowd in the direction of the house from which the disturbance appeared to come.

CHAPTER CCCXVI.

ELUCIDATES THE MYSTERY OF THE SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE OF EDGORTH BESS.

WE doubt not the reader feels a more than common anxiety to hear what befel Edgorth Bess after disappearing so abruptly from Jack Sheppard's gaze, as we have related in a precedent chapter.

For a brief space, then, we will part company with the thief-taker, and his gang, and the two fugitives, while we devote ourselves to the fortunes of the unfortunate heiress.

It would seem as though fate had singled her out for the object at which its most malignant shafts could be levelled; for, from the first, the poor girl had known nothing but poverty, persecution, and peril.

But, what was worst of all, the termination of all these sufferings seemed as far off as ever, and no sooner was she released from one danger than she was assailed by another.

It was not possible for her to remain unconscious of this.

The fact obtruded itself before her, and would not be repulsed.

Naturally enough, then, she strove to find some reason which would account for her being thus marked out as a victim to relentless persecution.

How was it that all the efforts which had been made to place her in her proper position should have terminated so disastrously?

For a long time she was unable to frame any reply whatever.

At length she came to the conclusion that the reason why they were so perpetually thwarted was because Blueskin and Jack had sought to obtain their ends by dishonest means.

There were various excuses which she knew would be urged, but she determined to pay no attention to any of them.

The past it was impossible for them to recall, but it lay in their power to amend the future.

This she determined should be done.

More than once she had been about to inform Jack of her reflections and resolutions, but from some cause or other, when the moment arrived, she slunk from doing

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She was ashamed of herself for this exhibition of weakness, and she resolved not to hesitate the next time.

And so things went on.

Whether, in her conjectures and conclusions, Edgorth Bess was right or wrong, we leave our readers to judge.

It was while she was in this frame of mind that the robbery in the lane occurred.

When, after Sir William, as he was called by the obsequious servant, had passed them, Jack had said he wished he had thought to ask the gentleman what time it was, and said he would run after him down the lane for that purpose, no suspicion as to his real object had entered her mind.

But the moment he had gone the thought struck her, and she was so overcome with the recollection of her own weakness in not being able to summon sufficient resolution to speak out upon the subject, that she sank down on her knees by the side of the lane where Jack had left her.

Looking in the direction he had taken, she found a turn in the road hid him from her sight.

She was, therefore, spared the additional pang of being a witness to the robbery.

Sounds of a struggle, however, reached her ears, and confirmed her utmost dread.

She did not swoon, but it was only by the greatest efforts she could make that she retained her senses.

At length she heard Jack returning.

She heard him call upon her by name, but she was unable to reply.

At last he found her, and raised her to her feet.

Then ensued that conversation which we have already placed before the reader.

She told him her convictions, and implored him to make a change in his tactics; but, ere she could wring a consent from him, a lumbering stage reached her ears.

It was the London stage-coach approaching.

To her unbounded astonishment, Jack hailed the vehicle, and, before she could recover from her surprise sufficiently to expostulate or resist, he had opened the door of the coach and lifted her in.

Then she had sunk upon a seat and burst into tears.

The reader will remember that upon the arrival in London, Edgorth Bess, convinced that the possession of the stolen money could do them no good, implored Jack, with the greatest earnestness, to fling it away.

But her companion, who had had a larger experience of the world, and who knew that, if he parted with this money, their position would be truly desperate, for the first time in his life hesitated about acting implicitly in the manner which she directed.

He endeavoured, as well as he could, to urge upon her another view of the case.

This, however, he found was quite useless, though he persevered in the use of such arguments as at the moment he was able to command.

But his companion, so far from replying to or noticing his objections in any way, did nothing but repeat her request that, since it was impossible for him to return the articles to their proper owner, he should throw them away.

With the result of this interview the reader is acquainted.

Jack, though he did not flatly refuse to do as she required, hesitated, and showed no appearance of being willing to do so.

On the contrary, he exhibited the utmost reluctance.

Not only was she vexed to think he did not take the same view of the case as she did, but secretly mortified that he, to whom all her former wishes had been law, and productive of immediate obedience, should now refuse this request, which she was assured in her own mind was of such vital importance to their mutual interests.

A feeling nearly akin to anger found a place in her breast, when she discovered her wishes to be so little regarded; and, at length, to such a pitch did this feeling reach, that she, as she had threatened, uttered the word farewell, and left him.

Without noticing which way she took, and, without taking into consideration the consequences that would be almost certain to follow this hasty action, she turned round and ran rapidly away.

The thick haze which filled the streets hid her in a moment from Jack's anguished gaze, and, as we know, all

his subsequent efforts to obtain a glimpse of her were fruitless.

That this should be so will not appear at all astonishing to anyone acquainted with the intricacies of the streets of London. They will know that in two moments it is possible to lose sight of a person, even in broad daylight, and that all attempts to find him would prove abortive.

Jack, however, had the fog to contend with, and, moreover, his mind was in such a state of perturbation at her sudden disappearance, that he was incapable of looking about him with proper coolness.

Thus was it that he failed to find her.

As for Edgworth Bess, her eyes filled with tears, and her heart swelled with grief; she, without considering what she was about, ran rapidly and deviously along.

She was oblivious of the fact that Jack might have the greatest possible difficulty in finding her.

She was only conscious that he had hesitated and refused at a moment when she thought he would be least likely to do either the one or the other.

So she ran on.

She fancied that while she continued this rapid motion her feelings would not be so acute, and probably in this she was correct.

More than one person turned round, with surprise, as the flying form of the young girl flitted by them, but each had his own business to attend to, and no time to look after other people's, and so she was suffered to pursue her path unmolestedly.

But at length, startled by the sudden clearing up of the fog, and the bursting forth of the sun, she paused and looked about her.

She found she was in London, but in a portion of it with which she was totally unacquainted.

In vain she looked all around her for some familiar building.

Not one was to be seen.

She now began to repent that she had acted in so rash a manner, and left Jack so suddenly as she had.

Now she would have given worlds to have seen him, to have once more rejoined him.

But, as with tearful eyes she looked in every direction, she was unable to see anything of him.

She felt now as though her heart would surely break.

What to do, or where to turn, she knew not.

She was even ignorant of the way she had just come, and could not have retraced her steps had her life depended upon her doing so.

The streets, too, began to fill with people, and these, being for the most part the dregs of the population, insulted and jeered her for the forlorn appearance which she presented.

She shrank back from them with a feeling of loathing.

But in vain.

They pressed still more closely around her, until, at length, she was compelled to fly, once more, at the top of her speed, to escape their persecutions.

A hooting mob, composed principally of evil-disposed children, followed her in a yelling throng, and pelted her with such missiles as came conveniently to their hands.

At length, however, without having received any injury, she was fortunate enough to distance them.

As soon as she was able, she reduced her pace, and once more looked about her, and endeavoured to ascertain her whereabouts.

But again she found herself at fault.

She had never possessed an intimate or extensive knowledge of London; for, from a tender age, she had been employed working early and late for the means of supporting a wretched and miserable existence.

Thus she had never had many opportunities afforded her of going abroad.

The character of the locality in which she now was differed essentially from that which she had just left.

The houses were old-fashioned, and many of them showing the effects of time rather conspicuously; but, from the general appearance of the exteriors, the inhabitants of them appeared to be respectable people.

The streets were quiet, and almost free from vehicles and passengers.

The houses were almost all private ones.

It was only at irregular intervals that she encountered a shop, and these were invariably small, and but scantily furnished with vendibles.

Almost heartbroken, the poor girl looked around her.

No familiar object met her eye, and though she had not expected such a thing, yet she could not help feeling disappointed when she found that no trace of Jack Sheppard was visible.

His refusal filled her breast with the greatest torture, and she thought that perhaps now, while she was looking so eagerly for him, he was altogether heedless of her whereabouts.

This was a thought so poignant that she burst into a flood of tears, of so violent a character as to be actually terrible to witness, while convulsive sobs came from her distracted bosom.

CHAPTER CCCXVII.

THE POSITION OF THE POOR HEIRESS CHANGES FROM BAD TO WORSE.

BUT it was only for a few moments that this thought held possession of the poor girl's mind; and, when she had banished it, she wondered how she had first entertained it.

She looked back upon the past, and recollected the thousand proofs which Jack had given her of his affection, and she had perceived no abatement of it, except such as his refusal to throw away the money indicated.

Could she, then, believe that he was heedless of her whereabouts?

Ah! no; doubtless at that very moment he was eagerly searching for her in every direction.

She now deeply blamed herself for having acted so hastily as she had.

Jack would search for her now unremittingly, she felt certain, and she would search for him.

If they both did this, they must eventually meet each other, and she hoped this would happen soon.

Encouraged by this hope, she looked around with a more hopeful gaze; but her eyes encountered not the wished-for form.

Still she hastened onward, expecting every moment to arrive in some locality with which she was familiar.

But all was strange to her.

What pained her most was that she was now beginning to feel the effects of such long-continued exertion.

She was, in fact, terribly fatigued; and her limbs threatened every moment to give way beneath her.

The miles she had by this time walked and run was incredible.

She was, too, almost famished.

Many hours had elapsed since food last passed her lips, and hunger was gnawing at her breast.

These two circumstances could not fail to have an effect upon her mind, and she again suffered the utmost depression of spirits.

This increased as her hunger and fatigue became greater.

At length, thoroughly wearied out, she found she could go no further.

She paused, and looked around her.

But she was so giddy and sick that she was only able to see, confusedly, that she was in a long, dark street, containing many ancient-looking houses.

A sigh of disappointment and despair came from her lips, and then, unable any longer to support herself, she sank down upon a step which led up to a ruinous-looking edifice.

Burying her face in her hands, she burst into another flood of tears; and again sobs of the most heartrending description came from her breast.

Her grief was now ten times greater than before.

Oh! how bitterly she reproached herself for having acted so rashly as she had! for, not only had it been productive of so much suffering to herself, but to Jack also, who could not but feel deeply the separation.

Regrets, however, were useless; and this conviction only added to her grief.

And now a dreadful lassitude began, by slow degrees, to creep over her.

At first she was insensible of it, until too late to check its progress.

It proceeded from the combined effects of fatigue and hunger.

It seemed to hold her will powerless.

She found herself, not only unable to move, but unable to make the mental effort to do so.

By degrees all feeling left her.

She became unconscious of her situation—of her hunger and of her fatigue—though there still lingered about her brain a dim remembrance of where she was.

But at last even this sensation passed away, and she lapsed into a state of utter insensibility.

How long she remained thus she knew not.

For a time, she had not the least idea of what happened.

It was not for long, however, that she was permitted to remain unmolested on this doorstep.

That adverse fate which had so long been her lot still pursued her unrelentingly.

And yet, as she sat there, she looked an object which few would trouble themselves about.

Her dress was torn, faded, and travel-stained.

Her hair was in disorder, and but few traces of her beauty remained visible.

A close observer would, however, have noticed the grace of her whole figure, marred as it was by the rough clothing with which it was covered; and would have perceived the delicacy of her hands and feet, which so well corresponded with it.

Edgworth Bess knew it not, but she was in Westminster—a place which, a century and a quarter ago, was very much worse than it is at present.

It was, in fact, the resort of all those persons who procured a living in defiance of the laws by which the country is governed, and vice and crime of every description prevailed in it.

Into such a neighbourhood as this had the poor heiress been unfortunate enough to stray, and sink down without the power to protect herself.

Heaven help her! for she had, indeed, need of its protection.

The street in which she was happened to be one of a more respectable character than those which surrounded it.

It was quiet and retired, and Edgworth Bess remained insensible for nearly half-an-hour, before a single person came by.

At the expiration of that time, however, a female emerged from a side street, and passed the doorstep.

As soon as she saw Edgworth Bess, the woman paused.

She was very stout and masculine in appearance, being apparently about fifty years of age.

Her person was decked off with garments of the most gorgeous description, and, doubtless, when by themselves would have looked well, but, combined as they were, they had far from a pleasing effect.

The reader will understand us when we say that her dress was in colour crimson, of so brilliant a hue as to be almost painful for the eye to look upon it.

Over her shoulders she wore a shawl of huge dimensions.

Its colour was a bright yellow, and ornamented with huge figures of birds and flowers, which appeared to be embroidered upon it with silk of a vivid green.

On her head she wore one of those small, coquetish-looking hats, which, upon a young and handsome girl, looked so bewitching, if we may trust to the fidelity of the portraits which have come down to us.

But upon the head of this extraordinary-looking female quite a different effect was produced; moreover, it was ornamented with a feather of the deepest scarlet.

Add to this that her face vied in redness with any of the garments she wore—that her eyes were small, ferrety, and moist, from the effects of strong liquors—that her nose was of an unnatural size, and embellished with carbuncles of purplish hue, doubtless attributable to the cause above named—that, in fact, her whole figure was gigantic, and calculated to remind one more of an overgrown porpoise than aught else.

Such was the strange-looking and conspicuous female who, upon seeing Edgworth Bess sitting dejectedly upon the doorstep, paused before her.

At first she did no more than gaze at her with her humid eyes, but presently, appearing satisfied with what she saw, she drew closer to her, and then, for the first time, discovered that she was in a swoon.

In rather a rough manner the conspicuous female raised

the poor girl's head, and then, removing her hands, looked earnestly into her countenance.

A guttural sound, very much like a grunt of approbation, came from the woman's lips, and she looked anxiously around her to discover whether she had been observed.

But the street was quite deserted, and not a single human being was in sight.

Upon this she uttered another grunt, but whether this was of satisfaction at finding the street empty, or whether it was in consequence of the exertion she was compelled to make in order to once more bring herself to an erect posture, we know not.

At any rate, she left Edgworth Bess just as she had found her; and, with more speed than anyone would have deemed her capable of making, she waddled to the corner of the next street, and then beckoned violently with her hand to the driver of a hackney coach.

In obedience to the summons of the conspicuous female, the crazy vehicle was set in motion.

In the meantime the woman made her way back to where she had left Edgworth Bess.

When she arrived she was rather distressed with the exertion she had made, and puffed and blowed immensely.

However, opening a little fancy bag which she carried on her arm, she took out a small bottle containing some pungent volatile essence.

Removing the stopper, she held it close to the face of Edgworth Bess.

The effect was immediate.

The poor girl revived, and looked about her.

But her mind wandered, and she was not aware of where she was or what was happening around her.

By this time the hackney coach had arrived.

It was stopped just opposite to the doorstep.

The jarvey descended from his box, and opened the door.

At the request of the conspicuous female, he assisted her to place the almost lifeless girl in the coach.

Edgworth Bess sank back upon the seat as motionless and as ghastly as a corpse.

When this was done, the conspicuous female wiped her face with a blue silk pocket-handkerchief, and then regaled her nose with a pinch of snuff.

"Where to, mum?" asked the driver, who fancied he had got a good fare.

The conspicuous female settled herself in the coach before she deigned to reply.

Then, in a pompous, puffy sort of voice, she said—

"No. 74, Spring Gardens."

The driver mounted his seat with a disappointed air.

Spring Gardens was close at hand—so close, that it was hardly worth while to make a journey there; and the probability is that had Edgworth Bess been at all able to walk the coach would never have been called.

The driver would have all his trouble for nothing, though, from the peculiar character of the whole transaction, he fancied he should be able to extort a tolerable amount.

The pace of the clumsy vehicle was not very rapid, but still it took but a few minutes for him to reach his destination.

He pulled up before the door of a rather handsome-looking house.

It had a noble front, with a magnificent door, wide enough to have driven a carriage through.

The appearance of No. 74 revived the driver's hopes, and he jumped down with more than usual alacrity and opened the door.

The conspicuous female alighted, and he officiously assisted to lift out Edgworth Bess, and to knock at the front door, which was opened by a domestic, into whose charge the unfortunate girl was immediately given.

She then placed in the hands of the driver a five-shilling piece.

As this was only about six times the amount of his proper fare, he flung the coin on the ground, executed a contemptuous dance upon it, and poured forth a volley of abuse, of which the conspicuous female took not the slightest notice.

CHAPTER CCCXVIII.

IN WHICH EDGORTH BESS DISCOVERS THAT A GREAT CHANGE HAS TAKEN PLACE IN HER FORTUNES AND PROSPECTS.

Into what kind of hands had the poor helpless girl now fallen?

Were they good or bad?

Alas! when we reflect how rare a thing disinterested kindness is, and how seldom it is met with in London, we dread almost to ask the question, and shudder to reply.

We must leave time to answer the question.

At present we can do no more than describe all that took place.

The conspicuous female, having settled with the cabman, entered the house—or rather mansion, for its appearance was such as to deserve that appellation—with the air and manner of one who was mistress of it.

Edgorth Bess, still looking more like a dead body than a human being, had been deposited in the huge porter's chair.

At a word from her she was lifted from her seat, and carried up the broad flight of stairs which ascended from the hall, and placed in a luxuriously-furnished bedroom on the second floor.

The conspicuous female then summoned several female attendants, to whom she issued her instructions.

They appeared to obey her with reluctance, and yet it was as evident that they did not dare to refuse or even hesitate.

The manners of the extraordinary-looking female were very masculine and authoritative.

She uttered her commands in a loud voice, which sounded almost like the blast of a trumpet.

She exhibited not the least kindness towards these attendants.

On the contrary, she treated them just as an American overseer would a drove of slaves.

By her directions, which she stood by and saw executed, Edgorth Bess was undressed and placed in bed, when means were adopted to restore her to her senses.

Whether she had had experience in matters of this sort we will not say, but the conspicuous female was not long in doing this.

Edgorth Bess looked about her with a vacant stare.

Although she had been recovered from her swoon, her brain was in the utmost disorder.

This mental aberration was, doubtless, produced by want of food.

Perceiving the delirium with which she was seized, the conspicuous female was not long in coming to a correct conclusion as to the cause of it.

Some light food in a liquid form was prepared, and this the poor girl mechanically swallowed when it was held to her lips.

She was too much exhausted to make the least resistance, or even to sleep.

At length, when everything had been done calculated to procure her restoration to health and strength, she fell off into a deep sleep.

Upon this, the conspicuous female and her attendants withdrew, in order to allow her to remain undisturbed.

What was the motive which prompted her to take such extraordinary pains with a young girl found in the street, as Edgorth Bess had been, will soon become apparent.

This sleep continued for very many hours.

The food which had been given her, though small in quantity and easy of digestion, possessed a remarkable amount of nourishment, and when, at length, Edgorth Bess awoke, she felt well and comparatively strong.

The fever of her mind had abated, and when she opened her eyes she was in possession of her usual faculties.

What she saw, however, was quite sufficient to bewilder her.

As she gazed, one after another, upon the various articles of luxury the room contained, her astonishment knew no bounds, and she closed her eyes, fancying she was dreaming.

She then found herself endeavouring to recollect what had last happened to her.

For a long time her memory baffled her, but at length she remembered, with a sob of anguish, her hasty parting with Jack Sheppard.

From that point recollection rushed rapidly upon her, until she had sunk exhausted on the doorstep.

From that moment to the present was a blank, and she opened her eyes again, half expecting to still find herself seated there.

But she was deceived.

The self-same objects met her view.

She was puzzled and confused, and unable to think how she had reached her present situation.

All was vague conjecture.

At length she was driven to the conclusion that someone had found her while in her exhausted and senseless state, and actuated by motives of compassion for her sufferings had caused her to be brought thither.

When once this idea was started, she discovered numerous circumstances, all tending to confirm it.

She was undressed, and she no longer felt the cravings of hunger—therefore her wants had been attended to.

Involuntarily she poured out her thanks to her unknown benefactor, though there was no one by to listen to her words.

Then she strove to rise, but found herself reduced to such a state of weakness as made it absolutely impossible.

Then she once more occupied herself with her thoughts.

They were pleasant ones.

She believed she had found friends, who would assist her in her multitudinous difficulties.

In her innocence and simplicity of heart, she judged of the actions of others by herself.

Had she been in the position in which the owner of the room in which she lay evidently was, and she had seen a poor girl upon a doorstep dying with hunger and fatigue, she would not have hesitated a moment to do as she believed she had been done by.

It seemed to her perfectly natural and right, but those who knew the world would feel sure that all this had not been done without some ulterior object.

But such a thought as this never for one moment entered the pure mind of Edgorth Bess.

For a long time, then, she lay thus, indulging in her pleasant felicitations without anyone appearing to disturb her.

She tried to sleep again, but the novelty of her position would not permit her to do so.

She would not have felt quite so secure as she did, perhaps, if she had known that the door of the room in which she lay was locked.

In her present state, perhaps, it was well that she did not make the discovery.

Some time elapsed, and then, weary with thought, she must have dropped off into a kind of half-doze, from which she was aroused by hearing a slight sound, though what it was she could not exactly say.

It was, however, the click of the lock as the door was unfastened.

The conspicuous female entered, and carefully closed it after her.

She had removed her hat and shawl, but in lieu of the former she wore upon her head a turban, which gave her a very fierce and Mahomedan-like appearance.

It was composed of some bright scarlet material, and was adorned with some very remarkable-looking feathers.

Her face had not abated in redness, but its tint was rather subdued by the semi-darkness which prevailed in the chamber; for the thick blinds and curtains before the windows had been closely drawn.

A kind of twilight softened all things, and gave them a richness of appearance which in the bright glare of day they would not have possessed in so great a degree.

The fiery rubicundity of the conspicuous female's countenance, and the gorgeoussness of her apparel, did not therefore strike the beholder so much as when she was abroad.

The room shook beneath her ponderous tread as she made her way to the bedside of the poor girl.

Edgorth Bess looked up as she heard the approaching step, wondering and curious whether it was that of her benefactor.

By making a great effort, she raised her head a few inches from her pillow.

It was at this moment that the conspicuous female reached the bedside.

Bess looked at her eagerly, and then suffered her head

to fall back upon the pillow with an air of disappointment.

The countenance she now saw so close to her own by no means corresponded with the one which she had imagined.

Moreover, a sickening and disgusting odour of spirits assailed her nostrils as soon as the female approached her.

Edgworth Bess, however, rallied herself, and called in her good sense to her aid, and overcame as well as she could the repugnance which at first she could not help feeling.

She had been treated with kindness, and if the person who had befriended her was not favoured with a handsome and prepossessing countenance, it was no fault of her own.

Besides, the person who now stood beside her might not be the individual who had succoured her; but, perhaps, a nurse who had been appointed to attend upon her.

Revived by this conjecture, Edgworth Bess looked with a more satisfied expression into the woman's fiery countenance.

Just as she did so the woman spoke.

Her wheezy, thick accents made a disagreeable impression upon the poor girl's hearing.

In a tone which the conspicuous female intended should be eminently soothing and affectionate, she said—

"Well, my dear, and how do you find yourself by now?"

If Edgworth Bess had disliked the tones of her voice, she liked the manner in which she was addressed still less; but, as she considered she was not in a position to be so fastidious, she replied—though her voice was only a little louder than a whisper—

"I am better, much better, thanks to your kindness and attention."

"That's a good job," said the conspicuous female, with one of those grunts of satisfaction to which we have already reverted.

Edgworth Bess felt her antipathy rapidly increase—indeed, abhorrence is a word which would better express the nature of her feelings.

"Surely," she thought, "it is impossible that this can be the person to whom I am so indebted!"

She resolved to no longer have any doubts about the matter.

"Tell me," she said, "to whom I am indebted for this kindness. Let me know who it is, in order that I can pour forth my best thanks. I recollect all. Weary with fatigue, and famishing for want of food, I sank senseless upon a doorstep. There I must have been found by someone, but by whom I know not, and brought to this place, where I have had all my wants attended to. Believe me, I am deeply grateful—my heart overflows with gratitude; tell me, then, I implore you, who is my benefactor? Let whoever it may be, be brought to my bedside, and I will thank them with all the eloquence and fervency I possess."

"Very pretty," said the conspicuous female, with another grunt, and with particular emphasis, "very pretty, indeed!"

CHAPTER CCCXIX.

THE PRESENT GOOD FORTUNE OF THE PERSECUTED HEIRESS THREATENS TO BE OF SHORT DURATION.

THERE was something so extraordinary in this reply, that Edgworth Bess could not help her countenance expressing all the surprise which she felt.

There was something in this woman's appearance, manner, and speech, so utterly incongruous with the luxuriously and tastefully furnished bedchamber in which she stood, that had the same effect upon our heroine as a sudden discord in beautiful harmony would have upon a lover of music.

More than ever was she convinced that the being before her could not have been the one who had so generously snatched her from a dreadful death.

"It must be the nurse," she murmured, in so low a tone as to be inaudible to anyone but herself. "It must be the nurse who has been appointed to attend to me in my sickness."

As the poor deluded girl came to this erroneous conclusion her heart once more overflowed with gratitude at the kindness of her unknown benefactor.

Much did she wonder who she could be.

The owner of the house in which this beautiful bedchamber was situated, beyond all doubt.

That the being who stood at her bedside could be the owner seemed improbable in the extreme.

And yet what could be the meaning of her strange behaviour?

What could be the meaning of her strangely-uttered and viciously pronounced words when Edgworth Bess, in the sweet accents of her touching voice, implored her to say to whom she was indebted for her present good fortune?

This question was the most puzzling of all, and Edgworth Bess found herself quite unable to reply to it.

She could not reconcile her idea of this person being the nurse, when she thought of the words she had spoken.

So far from being any reply to her anxious queries, or indicative of a knowledge of who her benefactor was, they seemed merely expressive of approbation.

But of what?

Edgworth Bess could not tell.

The words she spoke seemed to have no sort of connexion with what she had just said.

Then there was the expression which appeared upon the conspicuous female's countenance.

She looked as though she was highly pleased or satisfied with something.

She nodded her head, too, in an approving manner.

Edgworth Bess placed her hands upon her temples, and strove to think clearly.

This, however, the more she strove, seemed to become more and more impossible.

Her body was weak, and her brain was suffering too much from previous agitation for her to be capable of much reflection.

Suddenly she felt all her ideas run into the utmost disorder.

Strange visions flitted before her, and then, uttering a long-drawn sigh, she fainted.

How long she remained in this state of unconsciousness she never knew.

When she recovered herself, however, she found the conspicuous female—for so, until we have some better appellation, we must continue to designate her—still bending over her bed.

From this she conjectured her swoon must have been of brief duration; and this was really the case, for, no sooner did the conspicuous female perceive what had happened, than she thrust her hand into her pocket, and, after some rummaging in that capacious receptacle, produced a small vial of pungent essence.

This she held to the poor girl's nostrils.

The effect was almost instantaneous.

Edgworth Bess opened her eyes.

Perceiving she had recovered, the conspicuous female waddled across the room to an elegant side-table, upon which several bottles and glasses were placed.

Selecting a small vial, she poured a portion of its contents into a goblet, which she then filled with water from an exquisitely-cut carafe.

This draught she held to the lips of Edgworth Bess, who swallowed it mechanically, without knowing what it was or being aware of the purpose for which it was administered.

It was a soothing draught, and a few minutes after having drunk it the poor girl unconsciously fell into a deep and calm sleep.

No doubt this would be the means of doing her a very great deal of good.

It would allay the fever which held possession, not only of her body, but her mind.

As she lay thus asleep, the eyes of the conspicuous female seemed to gloat over her features and such portions of her person as the bedclothes left visible.

The satisfactory expression her countenance had worn deepened, and she chuckled in her throat.

Who could this mysterious female be?

What could be her motive for taking all this trouble?

No one, to look in her countenance, would imagine for a moment that it had been taken purely and disinterestedly.

And yet persons must not always be judged by appearances.

Time, however, will explain all.

At present we cannot help feeling apprehensive to a degree, and we are almost inclined to say that it would



THE STRUGGLE ON THE STAIRS.

have been better for her if she had been left alone upon the door-step upon which she had sunk.

When the conspicuous female had assured herself that the sleeping-draught had exercised its proper effect, she crept away from the bedside as quickly as she was able.

The slumber she knew, from the quantity administered, would last some hours.

For the present, then, all would be well.

Opening the door, she passed through it, taking care, however, to close it after her carefully, and to lock it securely.

Edgworth Bess was a prisoner, although the chamber little resembled a prison.

Unconscious, however, of this disagreeable fact, the young girl slept on quietly and dreamlessly.

When she awoke it was night.

But the apartment was not in darkness.

At the foot of the bed was a magnificent dressing-table, fitted with a looking-glass of such dimensions as would exhibit the whole figure of a person reflected in it.

On either side of this glass was an ornamental bracket composed of Parian marble, and fixed against the wall.

Upon these were placed two elegantly sculptured figures, representing vestal virgins.

Each held in her hand a lamp, from which proceeded the soft, mellow lustre that filled the chamber.

The glass globes protecting the lights were tinted a bright crimson colour, and this had the effect of imparting to the lustre a rosy hue.

By the aid of these two lamps, the various luxurious articles the room contained were rendered visible.

It imparted to them an appearance of exceeding richness.

Never in the whole course of her existence had the poor heiress beheld anything so beautiful; and, as she lay there, with her intellects still in some confusion, she wondered to herself whether all which she then saw, or fancied she saw, was not the creation of a distempered brain.

As her mind grew calmer, however, she became convinced of the reality of what she saw before her, and with

great pain and difficulty recalled to her recollection all the occurrences of the past.

There were blanks here and there which she found herself incompetent to fill up, but eventually she came to a tolerably clear notion of her position.

She still clung to her original idea.

She recollected sinking down upon the door-step, and then, on returning to her senses, finding herself where she now was.

Some kind lady had, she felt sure, taken compassion upon her; and once more she felt her heart overflowing with gratitude.

She found, however, that thinking made her head ache terribly, and she determined for the present to postpone her reflections.

She next attempted to rise, but found herself in such a state of weakness that she could not so much as lift her head from the pillows.

After this, unconsciousness again came over her.

Upon awakening, she found it was daylight.

During her slumber the chamber had been entered, for the lamps, which she recollected seeing alight, were now extinguished.

The full glare of day was not allowed to enter through the casements.

They were darkened with thick curtains, so that in the room only a kind of misty twilight prevailed.

Looking round, Edgworth Bess was startled to perceive standing by the bedside the same strange-looking female she had before seen, and who, she had made up her mind, had been appointed to attend to her wants.

As her eye rested upon this woman's countenance, however, she felt an invincible feeling of repugnance spring up in her breast, and with a faint shudder of loathing she strove to shrink as far away from her as possible.

Her supposition that this woman was a nurse was destined to have some doubts cast upon it.

Finding Edgworth Bess to be awake, the conspicuous female, in a shrill tone of voice, cried:

"Jane, Jane, where are you? Come here this minute! Confound you all, is it any good for me to speak, I wonder?"

Edgworth Bess looked round in astonishment; she could not, for the life of her, think what was meant.

The mystery was soon cleared up.

A pretty-looking girl, about eighteen years of age, entered the room in obedience to this call.

She carried in her hands a tray, upon which was spread a light repast.

This she placed upon the bed, and Edgworth Bess immediately comprehended that it was for her the meal was intended.

She felt low and faint for want of sustenance.

Still, she was unable to raise herself to partake of the tempting but light viands spread before her.

The young girl Jane, however, raised her carefully, and propped her up with pillows.

With difficulty, then, Edgworth Bess took that refreshment so necessary to her vitality.

She addressed several questions to Jane and to the conspicuous female, but she received only evasive and ambiguous replies.

Upon the countenance of the former she could not help noticing that a sad and pained expression appeared whenever their eyes met.

What could be the reason of this, Edgworth Bess could not imagine, and the rebuffs she had previously received discouraged her from making an inquiry respecting it.

When the meal was ended, the poor heiress felt much stronger and better; indeed, there was nothing ailed her but the weakness occasioned by want of food.

Turning now to the conspicuous female, she entreated her to give her some information; but she was refused in a peremptory manner, and she was somewhat harshly bidden to lie down and compose herself to sleep, as she was not yet well enough to enter into an excited conversation.

With a sigh, Edgworth Bess obeyed, and the conspicuous female and her attendant departed from the chamber.

It was only natural that Edgworth Bess should almost immediately sink into a profound slumber.

That was the course which Nature took to recuperate her strength.

Once more it is night in the mysterious house in Spring Gardens.

Once more the elegant lamps on each side of the dressing-glass in that luxurious chamber diffuse their rosy, mellow light around.

But this time Edgworth Bess is not awake.

Her deep slumber has continued for many hours, and still shows no signs of ceasing.

Her light and regular breathing is the only sound which has broken the deep silence of the room for a long time.

But, hark!

Another sound now strikes upon the universal stillness.

It is a sharp sound, which ceases almost in a moment.

It is the snap of a lock, as the bolt flies back into the matrix.

The door opens.

The conspicuous female enters.

Her step is heavy, but upon the thick, soft carpet of that bedchamber is inaudible.

Stealthily she approaches the bedside, and an expression of satisfaction steals over her fiery countenance when she finds that Edgworth Bess is still sleeping.

Stepping back a pace from the bedside, she placed one finger on her lip, as though to enjoin silence, and with the other hand she beckoned someone who appeared to be standing on the threshold.

In obedience to this summons, a young man entered on tiptoe.

His dress was rich, and such as at that period was worn by the highest nobles in the land.

The rosy lamplight fell with rich effect upon it, and imparted great magnificence to the jewels which sparkled on the hilt of his dress-sword and upon various parts of his person.

"Hush!" whispered the conspicuous female, in a faint whisper, as he approached. "Hush!"

CHAPTER CCCXX.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD MAKE A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM JONATHAN WILD.

TRULY did despair take possession of the heart both of Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, when, almost exhausted by the exertions they had made, they turned down the alley, in the hope that it would enable them to escape, and then found that it had no outlet.

Jack made this discovery before the yelling tones of Jonathan's hideous voice reached his ears and informed him of it.

What to do now he knew not, for he could see no chance of ultimate escape.

The only course open to them for adoption was to enter one of the houses, and Jack comprehended in an instant all the peril which would accrue to them if they did this.

But there was no choice left to them, and let what would be done, their position could not be worse than it would be if they remained in the alley.

Nor was there any time for deliberation.

Another second, and the thief-taker and his janizaries would fill the place.

With the instinct of despair, then, Jack Sheppard turned round, and grasping the hand of Blueskin, led his exhausted friend across the alley in the direction of the nearest doorway.

It was situated in a corner, and plunged in profound darkness.

This was all the better for them, since it decreased the probability of their being seen.

Two ruinous and broken steps led up to this door.

Hastily Jack ascended them.

His companion followed him with difficulty.

Jack pressed against the door.

To his surprise, no less than his gratification, it yielded.

It had been left ajar by someone.

Ominously it creaked as it swung back on its hinges.

Jack darted into the house, dragging Blueskin after him.

To close the door, turn the key in the lock, and shoot two bolts into their sockets, took little more than a moment.

They now ventured to give a sigh of relief, though their danger was only slightly diminished.

They endeavoured to look around them, but could not.

The whole place was buried in the most profound

darkness, and from nowhere came the faintest scintillation of a light.

They groped onward for a few paces, until they came in contact with some obstacle which prevented their further progress.

A rapid examination of it by means of his hand convinced Jack that it was the balustrade of a staircase.

He communicated this discovery to Blueskin in a whisper, and they agreed to ascend these stairs, wherever they might lead, and trust to good luck and the chapter of accidents to befriend them.

The stairs were steep, and creaked at every step they took.

They made but slow progress.

Not only was the intense darkness confusing, but Blueskin could only ascend with great difficulty.

At length they reached the landing upon the first floor. Here there was a very faint-light visible, which came from a window opposite to the head of the staircase.

Through this the faint night light came, causing the different objects around to be dimly visible.

With two bounds Jack reached this window.

As he expected, from its position, it commanded a view of the alley.

Looking down, he saw that it was crowded with people.

He was able to see their upturned countenances plainly enough, for at almost all the other windows people with lights were looking out to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

It was the reflection of these lights which enabled Jack to see what was going forward.

That which met his gaze so much surprised him, that he stood as if spell-bound, and unable to stir hand or foot.

Blueskin, too, who had reached his side, experienced the same sensations in an almost equal degree.

They saw Jonathan Wild force his way through the dense throng.

They saw him raised in the air above those surrounding him by two of his janizaries.

Then they heard his voice, which was so loud that no one in the neighbourhood could avoid hearing it.

His words struck terror to their hearts, and what little hope they had of making their escape was now destroyed.

The offer of one hundred pounds for each person to search the house in which they lived would, Jack felt certain, set the whole of the inhabitants on the alert.

Discovery seemed inevitable; and doubtless the number of people in each house would be so great that they would not be able to get clear of them before Jonathan arrived.

To meet danger half-way, however, was never a failing of Jack's.

There was now the most pressing necessity for immediate action.

"Come!" he said to Blueskin, speaking in a low voice, and yet as cheerfully as he could. "Come, friend, we must make one bold effort for freedom, or we are lost indeed!"

"I am afraid we are lost already!"

"Nay, do not despair! We are not captured yet!"

"But what hope have we of escape?"

"Not much, I confess, though I don't think we ought to give up on that account, but try what can best be done! Follow me! Perhaps even now all may be well!"

"I am very weak, Jack," rejoined Blueskin. "My head swims round and round! The exertion I have already been compelled to make is too much for me, and I feel completely overpowered!"

"Nay, nay! Do not speak in so desponding a tone of voice! Summon to your aid all the energy and strength you possibly can! We must make one last effort!"

While this little conversation had taken place, the two friends had not remained standing idly by the window, but had recrossed the landing in the direction of the stairs which led to the upper portion of the house.

These they ascended, Jack lending Blueskin all the assistance he possibly could.

As they went higher the staircase became lighter, and this enabled them to make better speed.

Within the house all was still for a moment or so after Wild had concluded his extraordinary speech, and then our friends heard people moving about in all directions.

Doors were opened and closed, and lights gleamed upon the walls.

But Jack and Blueskin continued their upward course, hope reviving in their hearts at every step they took.

The top of the second flight was almost reached, when a man sprang with great suddenness across the landing and rushed down upon them.

This man was of fierce and ruffianly aspect, and appeared to be the possessor of enormous strength.

Instinctively the man seemed to know that Blueskin was the weaker of the two, and that if he detained him the other would not leave.

Accordingly he grasped Blueskin tightly, and then set up such a succession of shouts as must have reached over the whole neighbourhood.

Blueskin felt himself utterly incapable of coping with this man.

With a sigh he gave himself up for lost.

He did not even attempt to grapple with his foe, but merely clutched the balustrades, with all his remaining strength, to save himself from being thrown down.

In vain the man strove to force him from his hold.

Blueskin clung to the woodwork with the energy of despair.

In the meantime, Jack was not slow in coming to the assistance of his comrade.

The first shock of surprise over, he seized the man, and, urged on by the desperate nature of their position, struggled with him.

He was by far Jack's superior in strength, and, doubtless under ordinary circumstances, Jack would not have stood the faintest chance of obtaining the victory.

But now the case was different.

Almost maddened by this interruption, which threatened to be fatal, Jack felt himself endowed with thrice his ordinary strength.

The man found him a formidable assailant, but, nevertheless, he did not loose his hold upon Blueskin, whom he determined to grasp until assistance arrived, which he was convinced would be but a moment or two at most.

Jack was desperate.

He struggled with the utmost fury.

Blueskin, with much trouble, retained his hold upon the balustrades.

These were old and frail, and swung backwards and forwards, threatening every moment to give way and precipitate all three to the floor beneath.

And now footsteps could be heard ascending.

They were many in number, and a confused murmur of voices mingled with the sound.

Above them all, rose one whose tones were most distasteful to Jack's ears.

This was the voice of Jonathan Wild.

Inspired by the hope not only of recapturing his escaped prisoner, but Jack Sheppard as well, the thief-taker sprang up the stairs two at a time; and such was the extraordinary speed he made, that he quickly left the rest far behind, although they mounted with great rapidity.

But none of them possessed such a powerful stimulant for action as Wild did.

Up he came, uttering fierce cries of mingled rage and triumph, each one of which increased the desperation of Jack's former conduct to frenzy.

The form of the dreaded thief-taker came in sight.

Jack saw him.

A horrible expression was upon his countenance.

In three seconds more, the men by whom he was followed would be in sight.

Loudly he called out to the man to retain his hold a moment longer.

The hope of receiving the hundred pounds he thought would enable him to do so.

But he did not calculate the effect which this immediate prospect of capture would have upon Jack Sheppard.

In a moment he seemed to receive the strength of a dozen men.

With one terrific wrench he caused the man to release his hold upon Blueskin, who nevertheless was so exhausted that he continued to cling to the balustrades.

With the same preternatural degree of strength Jack continued the struggle.

The man found himself being forced gradually backwards.

Suddenly Jack released his hold.

His adversary was surprised at this action.

Before he could recover himself, however, Jack struck

him two violent blows, which succeeded each other so quickly that there was no perceptible interval between them.

The man staggered from their effects, so violently and forcibly were they delivered.

But by this time the thief-taker had only about half a dozen steps to ascend before he should be upon them.

Now was the critical moment.

How he did it Jack could never afterwards exactly tell; but, as the man staggered from the two blows and slightly relaxed his grasp, Jack again seized him, and with one tremendous effort hurled him down the staircase.

He would have inevitably followed his foe—for he felt himself lose his balance—had not Blueskin, who saw the danger, suddenly stretched forth his hand and caught him by his coat.

That enabled him to recover himself.

The man, however, who rolled headlong backwards down the staircase with terrific velocity, as a matter of course, came in contact with the thief-taker as he was ascending.

So rapidly had all this taken place that Wild did not perceive his danger until it was too late for him to step aside and avoid it.

Crash came the body of the falling man against him.

Instantly he lost his footing, and felt himself impelled with fearful force down the staircase.

Not far below him was his son, and just behind his son a crowd of people.

Like a cannon-ball he dashed upon them, and a scene of the most indescribable confusion ensued.

This was the moment for Jack and Blueskin to achieve their escape.

If they failed to do this before the thief-taker and his crew recovered, it would be all over with them.

Blueskin saw this at a glance.

Jack spoke to him encouragingly, and then, animated by the hope of yet effecting their escape, they bounded up the next flight of stairs, which communicated with the attics.

Here they doubted not they should readily enough gain access to the roofs.

The only question was, would Blueskin be able to support so much exertion?

This must be tried.

Without waiting to see the results of the fall of the thief-taker among his men, both darted up the stairs.

It was probable that above they would meet with fresh enemies, but this apprehension was groundless.

A moment's reflection told Jack that had anyone been above they would long ere this have made themselves visible and come to the aid of the man who had been so signally defeated.

At length the attics were reached.

The two fugitives saw a partially-open door before them, and, perfectly indifferent as to where it led, they darted through and rapidly closed it after them.

CHAPTER CCCXXI.

JACK SHEPPARD TAKES A LEAP OVER THE HOUSETOPS,
TO THE IMMINENT PERIL OF HIS LIFE.

JACK SHEPPARD'S first impulse upon entering this room was to run his hand rapidly over the door to find what fastenings were upon it.

He did this before he even glanced around him to ascertain what kind of place he was in.

His hand first encountered one of those rude drop latches which are even now to be found in old houses, but which at the period of which we are writing were almost the only kind in use.

There was no means of fastening this, so Jack raised his hand to the upper portion of the door, and was well pleased to encounter a bolt.

This he immediately shot into its socket.

Stepping down, he found another bolt a foot or so from the floor, which he treated in the same manner.

All this occupied such a short time as to be almost imperceptible.

The closing of the door and the shooting of the bolts seemed to occur simultaneously.

As he turned round after doing this, the faint notes of a child's voice struck upon Jack's ear.

The interior of this room or attic, for such it really was, was plunged in darkness; but to Jack's eyes, accustomed as they were to the gloom, it quickly resolved itself into a kind of twilight.

He saw his companion Blueskin leaning, faint and exhausted, against the wall.

He had not recovered from the attack which had been made upon him while on the stairs.

The crying of a child again attracted Jack's notice, and he found the sound proceeded from one corner of the chamber, where he could just distinguish the faint outlines of a bed.

Before them was a small window, and through this the night sky was visible.

Jack caught his companion by the arm.

"Come, Blueskin!" he said. "So far all is well. Cheer up, my friend! One more effort, and we shall doubtless escape them! Come, collect your energies for this one effort! Yet stay! I ought to have thought of this before. Here is something which will doubtless serve you."

As he spoke these last words, in a hurried and disjointed fashion, Jack Sheppard plunged his hand into the pocket of his coat, and drew forth a pocket-flask.

The quantity of spirit it contained was very small indeed, but still he hoped there was sufficient to reanimate the shattered energies of his comrade.

He held it to his lips.

"Drink this," he said, "drink this. It is all I have left."

Blueskin needed no second asking.

Never did anyone require such a stimulant so much as he did at that moment.

But he did not drain the flask.

He drank only a small portion, and then, removing his lips, said:

"I am better now, Jack. I have not drunk it all; you finish up the remainder."

Jack would have been heartily glad of a draught of spirit just then, but he thought how much more his wounded and exhausted companion wanted it than he did, and he conquered the impulse he had at first felt to lift the flask to his mouth.

"No, no, Blueskin," he said; "I can do very well without. Do you drink it, and get all the strength you can, for we have yet much to do."

Blueskin already felt the beneficial effects of the small quantity of brandy he had drunk, and he did not any longer hesitate to finish the remainder.

He drained the flask in a moment, and then, returning it to Jack, he said, in a surprisingly altered tone of voice:

"Quick! If we are to escape we must lose no more time, or Jonathan will quite recover from the panic into which we have thrown him."

"True; but if that fall down the staircase don't confuse his faculties for some time to come, it's very odd to me. He won't get over it very easily or very quickly, I am sure."

"Recollect what a wonderful man he is. Hark! Can you hear them? They have begun to ascend the stairs again!"

Jack listened.

"It is so," he said; "they come! This door will be a barrier to them, but only a slight one; they will quickly enough demolish it. Still, it will hinder them a little."

"I am much stronger, and all the better, for the short rest I have had."

"That is good news! You speak better."

"I feel better, Jack."

"Follow me to the window, then. I doubt not we shall easily be able to reach the roofs, and then our chances of escape will be much increased."

As he spoke, Jack hastened across the room towards the window, beneath which was a small, rickety dressing-table.

He mounted upon this, and unfastened the window.

It was a small, diamond-paned casement, and one half of it opened outwards, like a door.

Jack looked out, and saw that, from the window-sill, there was a sloping piece of roof, which terminated, a few feet lower down, in a gutter, which was defended by a stout parapet.

This was enough.

Jack slipped through the window with the agility of a harlequin.

Holding himself as well as he could upon the slippery tiles, he assisted Blueskin to follow him.

They were only just in time.

Jonathan, with the fury of ten thousand fiends about his heart, was blundering up the stairs, maddened with pain, and followed by his men.

In another moment he would reach the door, to which his attention would doubtless be attracted by the crying of the child, which had continued without intermission, and was now louder than ever.

The moment Blueskin scrambled through the window, Jack closed it.

To fasten it was an impossibility, and this was a great pity. Could he have fastened the window, Jonathan would be in doubt as to which way they had gone.

As it was, he was compelled to leave the route taken apparent.

Dismissing this from his mind, however, he cautiously slid down the tiles into the gutter, where Blueskin was already standing.

He could not resist the impulse of looking over the parapet.

Nothing, however, met his view but a wilderness of roof-tops and chimney-pots.

Fortunately, for some distance right and left of them the houses appeared of a uniform height, which would make their progress all the easier.

They ran a great risk of interception, because the whole neighbourhood had been thoroughly aroused, and they could not tell how soon an enemy might appear from one of the numerous attic windows.

They kept on steadily, however, making as much speed as was consonant with their safety while in so dangerous a situation.

They had crept along the gutter over the roofs of several houses, when they were forced to come to a dead stop.

At this moment they were perhaps somewhere about a quarter of a mile from the window through which they had emerged.

A sudden uproar caused them to look back, and on doing so they perceived one of the circumstances which had occasioned Wild's delay, and prevented his getting upon their track sooner.

He had halted while links had been obtained.

One of these he now held in his left hand, while in his right he grasped his ponderous hanger.

His men crowded after him, and nearly all were furnished with lighted links.

A ruddy glare was consequently cast upon the roof-tops for a considerable distance round.

The scene was picturesque in the extreme.

Furious shouts came from the party.

They had made their way into the gutter, where they found ample proof of the presence of the fugitives, as well as a sure indication as to the route they had taken.

The gutter was filled with a soft, black, oozy mud, the accumulation of many years.

In this the feet of the fugitives had deeply sunk at every step they took. Consequently Wild and his men were able to follow in their track with all imaginable ease.

The howl of satisfaction which the thief-taker gave upon making this discovery was something awful.

Now he thought he should be able to follow them unerringly, and capture would be certain.

No matter where they went, he should be able to track them to their destination.

With the utmost eagerness, then, he pressed forward.

Too late, Jack Sheppard saw the imprudence of which he had been guilty.

Such a thing ought to have come earlier to his mind, and he should have taken measures to prevent such a palpable means of tracking him.

It was no use to trouble about that now, however.

The mischief was done, and could not be repaired.

Besides, his whole attention was required to devise some scheme by which the obstacle which opposed his further progress could be removed.

We have said that after going a long distance they were compelled to come to a halt.

That was because they had reached the brink of a gulf which yawned at their feet.

The block of houses along which they had made their way was divided by a court from a similar block of houses which was built upon the opposite side of it.

This court completely isolated the houses upon which these adventures were taking place from all others.

This was a terrible, unexpected, and apparently insurmountable obstacle, and it would seem that all the efforts they had made to achieve their escape would prove abortive.

All their exertions seemed in vain.

They had the choice of two alternatives.

One was to remain where they stood and be captured by the fast-approaching thief-taker and his gang, or else to leap into the gulf beneath.

Jack shuddered as he thought of this latter alternative, and turned round to face his foes.

Onwards over the roof-tops they came, in prodigious numbers, and raising a terrible clamour.

Foremost in the throng, however, Jack Sheppard could distinguish the bulky form of Jonathan Wild, making almost superhuman efforts to overtake them.

What was to be done?

Despairingly they glanced around them.

The opposite houses, from which they were separated by the court, seemed like a haven of safety.

They were mocked by them.

To leap the intervening space with the chance of a fall to such a depth beneath was a feat of so desperate a character that even Jack and Blueskin, perilous as their position was, shrank back from it appalled.

Had they been nearer to the ground, and the chance of injuring themselves less, they would not have hesitated to essay the leap, especially when spurred on by such inducements as they were.

But the thought of falling down such a dreadful abyss made them hold back.

Every instant, however, increased the emergency of their situation.

Ere their hearts had pulsated many more times, the thief-taker would be upon them.

With a speed that showed an utter recklessness as to personal consequences, he made his way along the gutter, and it was through this very recklessness that he succeeded in getting so far ahead of his men as he did.

"What is to be done, Blueskin?" asked Jack.

"I fear all is over with us!"

"We will not yield without a struggle!"

"What will it avail us?"

"Probably nothing, but I could not think of allowing them to capture me unresistingly. Do you think you could leap on to the opposite houses?"

"I fear not. Could you?"

"I don't know. I should not mind having a try. I would sooner run the risk of falling down into the street below and breaking my neck, than I would remain here with the certainty of being taken!"

"It is an awful risk!"

"It is indeed, and we must make up our minds quickly whether we are to do it or not, or it will be too late!"

"Look here, Jack. You are young and active. I have no doubt you could jump it easily enough. Do so, and secure your own safety!"

"And leave you here to be captured?"

"Yes; better one fall into the villain's hands than both!"

"No, no, Blueskin, my friend, I shall not desert you in the hour of your greatest danger!"

"Pho, pho! Escape while you have the chance!"

"Never! Either I leap with you or remain here!"

Blueskin could see by the resolute manner in which Jack spoke that he would be as good as his word, and he once more looked at the awful abyss, and calculated the chance of his being able to take such a leap with safety.

Jonathan's approach and his comrade's determination seemed to decide him.

"Try it, Jack!" he cried.

"Will you follow?"

"Yes!"

"You give me your word for it?"

"Here is my hand! Let me see you leap. If you succeed, I shall have a better heart to make the attempt!"

"Agreed!" said Jack, and as he pronounced the word

he grasped his comrade's hand warmly, for the thought came over him that perhaps that would be the last time he should be able to do so in life.

It might be that fate had decreed that one or both of them should pay the penalty of their lives for what they were about to attempt.

CHAPTER CCCXXII.

JONATHAN WILD CONTINUES TO PURSUE HIS VICTIMS WITH UNABATED VIGOUR.

ALTHOUGH it has taken so long to describe what took place from the moment when Jack and Blueskin sought safety and shelter by entering the house in the court, yet in reality a very short space of time sufficed for all that we have described to be done.

For instance, all the time that elapsed from the moment the two fugitives paused on the brink of the abyss up to the last event detailed in the preceding chapter was only so long as it took Jonathan Wild in his blind speed to get about three parts of the distance which intervened between them and the attic window through which they had passed on to the roofs.

But under such exciting circumstances it is wonderful how much can be done in a short space of time.

Having pressed Blueskin's hand, Jack Sheppard summoned all his energies, and prepared to take the fearful leap which would either place him in comparative safety or else destroy his life.

Shutting his eyes, however, as much as he could to the inevitable consequences of failure, he measured the distance and took a terrific spring.

Breathlessly his comrade watched him.

But his suspense was of short duration.

Jack cleared the space with comparative safety, and alighted on his hands and knees upon the slanting roof of the opposite house.

His faculties were too much confused by the force with which he had fallen for him to retain his position, and he rolled down the tiles.

Fortunately there was a parapet, and against this he rolled, which alone prevented him from falling into the street below.

Quickly recovering himself, however, he arose, being full of anxiety to know whether the same good fortune would attend upon his friend.

Stimulated by Jack's success and the ease with which he accomplished the leap, as well as by the increased rapidity of Jonathan Wild's approach, who perceived what had taken place, and hastened his steps accordingly, Blueskin, without waiting to see anything further than that Jack had alighted safely on the opposite houses, sprang forward with all the impetuosity he could command.

But either he did not measure his distance correctly, or else his bodily powers failed him.

He fell short of his mark.

Yet he reached the edge of the parapet.

He felt himself alight upon it, but he could not retain his footing.

Had he waited until Jack was in readiness to receive him, doubtless all would have been well.

As it happened, Jack, who saw what had taken place, was too late to save him.

For a space of time during which, perhaps, a watch could have ticked thrice, Blueskin's body balanced itself upon the parapet.

The least thing would have pulled him over.

But before Jack could seize him, the inclination of his body towards the street fearfully increased, until he hung quite down the abyss.

A shout came from Blueskin's lips.

It was echoed by one from Jack's, and re-echoed by a roar from Jonathan Wild, who was quite near enough both to see and hear what was taking place.

Blueskin gave himself up for lost.

The violence with which he fell upon the parapet partially deprived him of consciousness, but the hideous sensation of falling down the chasm restored him to himself.

He struck out with his arms and clutched the edge of the coping-stone with a grasp strengthened by the peril of his situation.

But he could not retain his hold.

He felt the stone slipping from his fingers.

He made another convulsive effort.

This time, Jack, heedless of his own danger in doing so, caught him by the arm with one hand.

Almost at the same moment he clutched him with the other hand by the collar of his coat.

But Jack could do no more.

His comrade's body was bulky and of great weight, and it was only by throwing himself as far back as possible and exerting his utmost strength that Jack preserved his own balance.

But Blueskin, feeling he was saved, struggled for himself, and endeavoured with all his might to climb over the parapet.

It was while things presented this aspect that Jonathan Wild arrived at the opposite brink of the abyss.

He waved his torch once round his head, to make it give forth a better light, and threw down his hanger.

It fell with a clattering sound upon the slanting roof and slid down the tiles.

His reason for doing this soon became evident.

It was the quickest and easiest means for him to disencumber himself of a weapon of which he did not just then want to make use.

With incredible rapidity he drew a pistol from his belt, cocked it, took aim, and fired.

A deafening report and a blinding sheet of flame followed.

Jack felt something whistle past his face when he heard the explosion, and then he knew he was saved.

It was the bullet.

He redoubled his efforts, and so did his comrade, until he at length got on to the parapet, and then Jack with a sudden exercise of strength pulled him over.

Jonathan saw he had missed his aim, and with a malignant curse he threw the discharged weapon at the two figures on the opposite house.

It struck Blueskin with such force on the shoulder that it wrung a cry of agony from his lips.

But for the moment they were safe.

Pained, bruised, terrified, and scarcely conscious that he had escaped a frightful fate, he struggled to his feet, and blundered in the direction in which Jack led him.

Speed now would be everything.

A hasty glance which Jack flung behind him showed him Jonathan standing with another pistol in his hand, which he was in the act of levelling at them.

Jack had just time to sink down, and drag his companion down with him, when the sound of the explosion struck upon his ears.

Springing up immediately, for he knew that that danger at least was over, Jack Sheppard drew his companion after him.

By this time Jonathan found himself surrounded by a crowd of people, who had with much difficulty followed him to the spot upon which he now stood.

They waved their torches in the air, but none of them made the least attempt to hazard the fearful leap from one housetop to the other.

Jonathan Wild measured the distance with his eye, and shook his head.

It would have been madness for him to make the attempt.

He was too thick-set and his body was too bulky for him to stand the least chance of effecting his purpose.

While he was thus compelled to inactivity, he had the mortification to perceive the prey which he had once or twice fancied he had actually in his grasp rapidly getting out of his reach.

He drew another pistol, and in tones which were shrill and shrieking through passion, he called to those around him to fire at the retreating figures, which in another moment would be lost to sight among the confusing shadows that fell everywhere.

As he spoke, he discharged his third pistol.

An irregular volley followed from the motley crew around him, but the fugitives were already too far off and their forms too indistinct to view for any of the shots to be effective.

What to do now Wild knew not.

To cross that chasm in time to overtake his prisoners seemed impossible.

He ground his teeth and stamped with rage.

At this moment a faint cry reached him from the rear.

The tone of the shout, for such it was, startled him, and

in common with all the rest, he turned round to ascertain the cause of it.

In the distance a man appeared, carrying a plank.

He had brought it from the roof of a house where some repairs were going on, and where it had been left by the labourers.

With a yell of satisfaction, Wild darted towards this man.

He comprehended in a moment the purpose which the plank was to serve.

Seizing it with his own hands, he ran back with it to the abyss.

He carried it as though it had been a willow wand.

Indeed, he was never conscious of its weight.

This will show the extent of the passion which held possession of him.

With frantic speed he placed this plank, which was only of the ordinary width, across the intervening space, in such a manner that it would imperfectly serve the purpose of a bridge.

Surely it was about as frail and perilous a one as could be well imagined.

But the thief-taker, wrought up to the extreme point of desperation, darted across it like a flash of light.

A cry of astonishment came from those who beheld him.

There was not one who cared about running such a risk of his neck.

The plank was only just long enough to serve its intended purpose, and in his haste Jonathan had placed it in such a position that it was frightfully insecure.

It bent down in the middle by its overweight, and for the want of some intermediate support.

Probably the weight of more than one person would cause it to break asunder.

Wild, upon reaching the other side, looked back a moment, and finding that none moved, he called out to them, in a furious tone of voice, to follow him at once.

But none stirred until they heard the remainder of his speech.

"I double the reward!" he cried. "Two hundred pounds! Two hundred pounds reward! Those who wish to earn two hundred pounds, follow me!"

These words produced an immediate effect.

It is really wonderful what efforts people will make upon the bare prospect of receiving a large sum of money.

The plank was quickly placed in a more secure position, and as quickly crossed by several persons, all eager in the extreme to earn the promised reward.

Finding that these passed over in safety, the others followed.

Wild, junior, was not among the number of those who thronged the roof-tops.

He had been wounded almost at the commencement of the affair by the shot which Jack aimed at his father, the thief-taker.

Against this hurt, however, he struggled manfully, and apparently took no notice of it.

With eager impatience he ascended the stairs while the man held Blueskin, and endeavoured to keep up to the thief-taker.

This, however, he failed to do, though he was in advance of all the rest.

This was the state of affairs when Jack hurled the man down the staircase.

Placed, then, as he was, he received the full weight and accelerated force of the falling man, and the thief-taker as well.

He was swept off his feet in a moment, and when he fell he was undermost of all.

Indeed, the rest, every one, seemed to fall on to him.

He at once became insensible.

Who was there that could retain his senses under such circumstances?

In this condition he was left along with the man, while all the others rushed upstairs in pursuit.

But an inevitable delay took place.

Jonathan Wild himself was partly stunned, and it is questionable whether he would have recovered himself had not one of his janizaries poured an immense quantity of brandy down his throat.

This was, as we know, the thief-taker's usual restorative, and it succeeded in the present instance

It was, perhaps, owing to this that his passion gained such an ascendancy over him as it did, and most likely to the same cause may be attributed the utter recklessness as to the amount of danger to which he exposed himself.

He went on, indeed, like a maniac; and that providence which it is said watches over drunken men and madmen seemed to preserve him from injury.

CHAPTER CCCXXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN, AFTER MANY PERILS, FIND A HIDING-PLACE, AND THE THIEF-TAKER CAUSES A CONSTERNATION IN THE WORK-ROOM.

THUS was it, then, that Wild, junior, was not at hand to second his father in what he did.

As for those men who accompanied Wild, several of them were his own janizaries, and the remainder persons who, having nothing better to do, joined in the chase, to which the prospect of obtaining at a stroke more money than they could earn with two years' hard industry gave an additional zest.

That they were quite willing to risk their lives for such a sum was evidenced by the manner in which they one after another crossed the narrow plank.

Had they been funambulists they could scarcely have performed their task better.

No sooner did they reach the houses opposite than they hurried on after the thief-taker, whose torch they could see at some distance.

Things now assumed somewhat of their former aspect, though, owing to the delay that had taken place in procuring the ladder and making use of it, Jack and Blueskin have got a capital start, which they strive to make the most of.

To their proceedings we now revert.

Every moment that elapsed brought Blueskin more and more to his senses, and he followed Jack with increased speed and ease.

That their ultimate escape now depended upon the exertions of the next few seconds Jack Sheppard felt quite convinced, and he rushed on accordingly.

At any other time the obstacles they overcame would have appeared insurmountable.

By the time Wild had got the plank, and placed it across the chasm in the manner we have described, the fugitives had got a considerable distance, and were, indeed, actually out of sight of their foe.

Owing to the rapidity with which Jack had sunk down, and dragged his companion with him, the second bullet from Wild's pistol was rendered harmless.

Then, as for the volley which was shortly afterwards fired, they were by that time too far off to be injured, and nothing more than a complete waste of powder and shot was the result.

The torches which Wild and his men carried enabled the fugitives to perceive them long after they themselves were hidden from the view of their pursuers by the increasing gloom.

Now or never was the time for them to seek some place of refuge and ultimate safety.

They were by this time a long way from the attic window from which they had emerged.

They stood a chance, then, of escape, if they could enter one of the numerous garret-windows before them, and work their way down into the street.

This they resolved should be attempted.

Pushing on, then, as fast as possible, Jack kept on the look-out for a window which seemed as though it would answer their purpose.

It was necessary to find one where they could enter with the certainty of being unperceived.

They were still unable to fix upon a suitable place of shelter, when Jonathan crossed over from the other block of houses.

This hurried them onward.

Just before them was an immense skylight in the roof of a house, through which came a feeble but continuous ray of light.

It was necessary for them to be cautious, but, in the haste he made, Blueskin trod upon a loose tile, which slipped from beneath his feet.

So suddenly was this done, that he could not preserve his balance, and fell heavily.

His left arm fell upon the skylight, and at once shivered one of its panes to atoms.

A shriek, which seemed to come from half a hundred throats at least, was the result.

Blueskin, cursing his ill-fortune, rose to his feet.

His fall had not injured him bodily, but he feared now that such an alarm would be raised as would bring Jonathan upon them almost immediately.

From the tone of the shriek Jack felt certain it was produced by females.

With an impulse of curiosity which he could not resist, he dropped down upon his hands and knees, and looked through the broken panes of the skylight.

Another shriek greeted him.

A somewhat singular scene was presented to Jack's view, but he took it all in at a glance, and instantly determined upon the course of action he was to pursue.

The room which the skylight was placed to illuminate was a large one, though irregular in shape, and with a low ceiling.

In it were seated a great number of young women; indeed, the first thought that struck Jack as being wonderful was how the room could be made to contain so many human beings.

All were engaged in the same employment.

It was sewing with the needle.

The utmost consternation was depicted upon their faces.

But such faces!

It almost broke Jack's heart to look upon them.

Every one was hollow, pallid, and emaciated to a degree.

Their eyes were all large, but lustreless.

Upon the cheeks of several the hectic spot of consumption was painfully apparent.

The dreadful trade at which they worked sapped the spring of life.

Jack noticed that there was not one really old face among them, though a large proportion exhibited all the tokens of premature age, brought on by long hours of work in an ill-ventilated apartment, insufficient sleep, and insufficient nutriment.

All seemed strengthless; and though, when they heard the crash of glass, they had all given utterance to a scream, yet there did not seem to be one who had physical power enough to move from her seat.

When they caught sight of Jack's countenance they set up another scream, but all still sat as motionless as statues.

From the ceiling of this room hung a rude and roughly constructed chandelier, upon which several tallow candles were stuck; and it was from these the light which had at first attracted Jack's notice proceeded.

Here, he thought, would be a place where they could safely ask for shelter, with the certainty of its being afforded them.

Jack's resolution was no sooner taken than he set about acting upon it.

Seizing the frame of the skylight as high as he could, he bade Blueskin enter.

He was immediately obeyed, and directly his comrade's head had passed through he followed him closer.

The trap-door fell down into its proper place at once.

The terror of the unfortunate sempstresses was now so great, that they were unable even to scream, but sat looking with glaring eyes upon the two fugitives.

Certainly the appearance of our friends was anything but prepossessing.

What the poor needlewomen thought of them would be hard, indeed, to say; very likely they expected nothing but immediate death, for their notions of what was likely to take place were rather confused.

The whole of their experience was confined to the work-room.

Jack saw all this, and hastened to reassure them.

He spoke in as calm and soothing a voice as he could command.

"Ladies!" he said, making a circular kind of bow to all who were in the room as he spoke, "I am exceedingly sorry that we should have alarmed you, and been compelled to intrude upon you as we have. But we are two poor fugitives from a relentless foe, who has pursued us until our strength is quite spent, and we can go no further. We, therefore, entreat you to afford us shelter.

You need be under no alarm; we would not injure any of you for the world! If you knew our story you would do your best to save us! Our death is sought by a ferocious villain because we are the only protectors of a poor girl, like one of yourselves, but who is heiress to some immense estates, of which this foe of ours unjustly holds possession. He wishes to slay us! The poor girl, of whom I have spoken, would then have no one to defend her.

"His next step would be to put her out of the way, and then he would have no difficulty in keeping possession of her wealth.

"He has pursued us over the house-tops, and in another moment he will be here; and, unless you can find us a place of concealment, he will certainly slay us before your very eyes!"

The trampling of feet on the roof above added confirmatory proof to what Jack had said.

The foregoing speech he had uttered with the greatest volubility.

But the poor white slaves understood it.

It was, above all, an address calculated to appeal at once to all their sympathies.

They could comprehend the fate of the poor heiress if deprived of her protectors, and, at all hazards, they resolved to hide them.

Jack saw in a moment that all would be well.

"Leave us to conceal ourselves," he said; "all you have got to do is to deny knowing anything about us, or having seen us."

While he spoke, Jack had been busily occupied in looking for a hiding-place.

By the time he had done, he had decided upon one.

In one corner of the room was a quantity of white garments.

They had just been made, and had been thrown where he now saw them for the purpose of allowing the forewoman to inspect the workmanship.

There was quite enough for Jack and Blueskin, by lying down, to be covered with them and hidden from sight.

Jack proposed this, and the needlewomen made no demur.

There was, indeed, no time to lose, for though the scene had taken place with great rapidity, another moment would suffice to bring Jonathan upon them.

With that quickness of apprehension which is so distinctive a characteristic of the feminine disposition, these poor creatures showed, by the ready way in which they set about concealing the fugitives, that they fully understood their situation.

Jack and Blueskin screwed themselves up in the corner of the room, contracting their bodies into the smallest possible space.

The clothes were then carelessly heaped upon them, but with true womanly art, and in an instant the heap assumed its former appearance, and there certainly was nothing whatever in the chamber to generate suspicion.

Scarcely, however, had they time to resume their seats and bend their fingers to their accustomed task, than the sudden glare of ruddy light came through the skylight, accompanied by the tramping of many feet.

Of course, placed as they were, Jack and Blueskin could hear every word.

The hiding-place which Jack had chosen may seem to be an inadequate one for concealment. But it was all the better on that account.

Jack knew from Wild's disposition that the more artifice they used in hiding themselves the more likely he would be to discover them.

Both held pistols in their hands, and the attitudes they had assumed were such that they could spring instantly and easily to their feet, should discovery be inevitable.

They had strong hopes, however, that if these poor needlewomen acted their part well, they should escape by Jonathan going off on a false scent.

Whether these anticipations were doomed to realization or disappointment time alone can determine.

With beating hearts they listened to what was about to happen.

The conviction that the next few moments would decide whether they would escape or whether they should be deprived of life and liberty whetted their sense of hearing.

The footsteps on the roof which they could hear so



ELGWORTH BESS AND THE YOUNG NOBLEMAN IN THE MOUSE IN SPRING GARDENS.

plainly passed close to the skylight, through which an increased red glare came into the room below.

Voices could be heard, and above all the rest the fugitives could distinguish that of their implacable enemy, the thief-taker.

Then there came a crash.

The skylight had been seized and thrown violently back upon the tiles.

A tremendous clattering of glass ensued, and the needlewomen gave a shriek of genuine fright.

Their terror was increased when, on the skylight being removed, the form of Jonathan Wild and those of his myrmidons, revealed by the torchlight, appeared before them.

The countenance of the thief-taker was indeed an awful sight to look upon, and well might those poor trembling creatures feel appalled.

Its expression convulsed with rage, as it was fiendish in the extreme.

The ruddy glare of the torches added to his demon-

like appearance, and the men crowded behind him like a throng of evil spirits.

For a moment Jonathan neither moved nor spoke.

He was engaged in looking down upon the scene thus unexpectedly presented to him, and endeavouring to find some trace of the presence of those two persons whose capture he was determined to effect.

CHAPTER CCCXXIV.

JONATHAN WILD IS BAFFLED BUT NOT CONVINCED, AND BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD OWE THEIR LIVES TO WOMAN'S SENSE OF HONOUR.

WHETHER anything indicative of the presence of Blueskin and Jack Sheppard met the hateful-looking gaze of Jonathan or not would be hard to say.

The idea that they would seek shelter at the very first opportunity they had was prominently before his mind, and the cause of his being so long reaching the skylight

was that he stopped occasionally in his progress to ascertain whether they entered any of the houses.

Many little things convinced him that, up to the present, they had not done so, and he reached the skylight only a little too late.

Here, however, he came to a dead stop.

After pausing a moment, as we have stated, he jumped down with great suddenness into the room.

At that moment the two fugitives fairly gave themselves up for lost.

They had the presence of mind, however, not to move a muscle.

They contented themselves with holding their pistols a little more firmly in their grasp.

A shock of genuine alarm followed Wild's sudden intrusion into the room.

His looks and manner were well calculated to produce such a feeling; and then the bang with which he reached the floor—for, of course, the distance from the floor to the roof was several feet—was positively tremendous.

It shook the whole house, and both Jack and Blueskin mentally remarked that if that did not cause the arrival of some more persons on the scene nothing would.

"Where are they?" yelled Wild, in his usual screaming accents, addressing the terrified girls, who had one and all rose from their seats. "Where are they, I say? Where have you hidden them?"

This pointed question, which seemed to indicate some knowledge on the part of the dreaded thief-taker of what they had done, so increased the alarm under which they were labouring, that there was not one of them who had the power to utter a word even if her life had depended upon it.

Jonathan was about to proceed to some additional enormity, when the door of the attic in which this singular scene was taking place was flung violently open, and a little thin, shrivelled-up woman, about thirty-five years of age, rushed into the room.

In a faint whisper, when they saw her appear, the needlewomen cried:

"Miss Blogg!"

This was the name of the new comer, whose appearance we have briefly described.

She was the forewoman of the establishment, and it was her duty to look after the needlewomen.

It was evident that, from some cause or other, she was boiling over with rage.

So great was it, and so much did it blind her, that she did not at first perceive that Jonathan Wild was in the room.

"Hoity-toity! Dear me! Indeed!" she exclaimed in the shrillest of all possible tones, and the most shrewish aspect imaginable. "So this is the way! Dear m— Oh!"

This last ejaculation, which she broke off in the middle of what she was saying to give utterance, was produced by her mingled astonishment and alarm at perceiving Jonathan Wild standing like a demon in the centre of the workroom, for it was by this appellation the miserable garret was designated.

Jonathan Wild, upon seeing her enter, turned round and made a mock bow, as he said:

"Really, madam, I am sorry if I have created a slight disturbance in your amiable family——"

Thus far did Jonathan proceed, but no further.

By the time he had uttered these words, Miss Blogg, the forewoman, had recovered herself.

If her form was small, and her body weak, she was, nevertheless, endowed with the spirit and courage of a lion.

The first shock of her surprise at finding so extraordinary a figure as the thief-taker in the workroom being over, she strutted forward, and placing her arms akimbo, looked up with a virago-like aspect into Wild's face.

She was in the habit of exercising command over the poor needlewomen, and so used to the obedience which she always received from them, that she, from force of habit, expected it from everyone else.

The most amusing thing was, she thought this universal deference was exacted by her own majestic air and deportment.

In what she conceived to be a very striking and effective manner, she stalked up to Jonathan Wild.

"Oh, dear me!" she said, for her style of conversation

was rather fragmental and disjointed, "oh, dear me! Yes, to be sure! Very fine, indeed! I shouldn't wonder! Of course—of course! What else can be expected? It's very good! I wonder you don't all laugh outright! I would!"

How long she would have continued this peculiar and unmeaning discourse no one knows, but Jonathan Wild interrupted her roughly:

"Hold your row, woman!" he said. "What do you mean by talking that nonsense? Mind what you are about, or you shall hang at Tyburn on Monday morning! I am Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker!"

At this dreaded announcement Miss Blogg uttered a scream of dismay, and seemed as though she was going to faint; but finding there was no one behind to catch her, and nothing convenient to fall upon, she altered her mind.

She also altered her manner.

In the most fawning and cringing tones imaginable, she said:

"I am sure, Mr. Wild, I didn't know it was you; but really these gals is such varmin'ts and scum of the earth, that——"

"The charge against you," continued Wild, not heeding this speech, "will be that of having concealed in your house two desperate robbers and murderers!"

"Oh goodness!" exclaimed Miss Blogg, "There's nothing of the sort!"

"Don't deny it, woman. Tell me where they are, and you shall have a couple of hundred pounds for your trouble. Here they are."

By way of adding effect to his words, Wild produced a thick black pocket-book.

Avariciousness was the particular vice of Miss Blogg.

To have obtained money she would have sold her soul over and over again, if she had only had the chance.

The bare mention of two hundred pounds was overwhelming.

"Oh, Mr. Wild!" exclaimed Miss Blogg, in the most impressive accents, "I can really assure you that no such persons as you mention have taken shelter here. I only wish they had, and you should have had them exchanged for two hundred pounds pretty quick."

"I can hear you are a sensible woman," said the thief-taker. "Now just listen to me."

"Yes, Mr. Wild."

"I have pursued two desperate characters over the roofs of some houses for a considerable distance, but I lost sight of them, and I feel sure they have got into one of the houses. Now this is the one, I am almost certain; because, I say, a pane in your skylight is broken."

"A pane broken!" ejaculated Miss Blogg. "Oh, heavens! how has that happened? It's some of you wretches," she said, turning to the needlewomen, who were all standing huddled together in attitudes expressive of the utmost fright.

"It's some of you wretches, I'll be bound! Now, then, who broke it? Tell me at once, or I'll fine you a shilling apiece all round."

The girls all declared they had not broken the skylight, at the risk of being fined a shilling each, which was somewhere about half their week's wages.

"Now just listen to me a moment," said Wild. "I make sure the two persons I am after have entered this room, because I find the skylight broken. Just tell me, if you please, when you were in the room last."

"About an hour ago, I should think!"

"Very well, that will do. Was the skylight broken then?"

"No, it wasn't!"

Wild's face assumed a triumphant expression.

"You are sure of that?" he said.

"Quite sure!" said Miss Blogg, emphatically, "because when I came in the skylight was open; the varmint said they wanted air. Air be blowed! What did they want with air? Was the wind to blow in and flare the candles away because they didn't burn fast enough?"

"But how are you sure there was not a pane broken?"

"Because I got up and closed the skylight myself," replied Miss Blogg, triumphantly.

"That will do!" replied Wild.

As he spoke, to the infinite terror of the poor girls, he turned towards them.

"Now look here," he said, in a voice that made what

little blood they had congeal in their veins, "if you don't tell me the truth about this matter you shall every-one hang at Tyburn before you are another week older."

"And serve them right, too, the wretches!" said Miss Blogg.

"Who broke the skylight?" repeated Wild. "Tell me at once, how was it done?"

"We don't know!" said some of the girls, with trembling voices.

"Don't know! What do you mean by that?"

"We don't know how it was done."

"Oh, but you own it was done?"

"Yes, sir; as we were sitting at work, all at once we heard something like footsteps on the tiles, and then there was a sound like a fall, and then there was a crash!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Wild. "And, now, what caused the crash? Tell me, or —" and Jonathan assumed his most menacing aspect.

"We don't know!" cried all the girls in chorus.

"You don't know?"

"No sir, we don't; we heard the crash, and it very near frightened us to death, and then we heard nothing else!"

"And no one entered?" asked Wild, misgivingly, for the thought occurred to him, that after having broken the skylight, the fugitives had continued on their way.

"No, sir; we heard nothing else!" said the girls.

Wild then uttered some very diabolical curses.

By this time, if they had not entered the workroom, as he made sure they had, both Blueskin and Jack Sheppard would be far enough away.

But he was not inclined to give up his point quite so easily.

He glared all round him.

Nothing but the bare walls met his gaze.

There was no place where they could be concealed, at all events, in that room.

As for the heap of sewing beneath which our friends were hidden, he never so much as caught a glimpse of it, for when they had started from their seats, several of them, with admirable presence of mind, stood before and completely concealed it from view.

Jonathan Wild was baffled; but, in spite of the evidence before him, he could not get rid of the impression that his prey had really sought refuge here.

He resolved to make one more attempt.

"Hark ye, my venches!" he said; "I have threatened you, and that will do no good, so now I shall make you a promise. If you tell me whether the two persons I want entered this room, the one that tells me shall receive two hundred pounds?"

The girls looked blankly at each other.

Can the reader conceive how anxious a moment this was for our two friends?

Reduced almost to the brink of the grave through starvation and hard work, as these girls were, and probably with someone dear to them whose life depended upon their efforts, could it be expected that they could withstand the temptation of giving Wild the information he wanted, and receiving for it the sum of two hundred pounds?

All remained profoundly silent, looking at each other with eager, inquiring eyes.

They were wondering whether one of their companions would speak.

Jonathan thought they were silent because they had not understood him.

He therefore repeated his offer, and as he did so he held out the bulky-looking pocket-book.

"Here is the money!" he cried—"two hundred pounds. I will give it to whoever gives me the information I require."

There was a momentary struggle with the spirit of right in their breasts.

But it quickly ended.

Right triumphed, and those poor girls achieved a victory of which only themselves were fully conscious.

"We know nothing of them, sir!" they said.

"We heard the window break, and we heard the tramping of feet upon the tiles above, but that was all!"

This seemed decisive, and Jonathan was unwillingly forced to come to the conclusion that for once in his life he was mistaken.

He thought those girls would never have proved proof against such an offer as he had made them.

He gave one last glance round the attic, but he saw nothing.

Slowly and unwillingly he turned round, and placing a chair beneath the skylight, mounted upon it, and in another moment stood among his men upon the roof.

Some kind of fascination seemed to compel him to linger about that spot.

He could not make up his mind to turn away.

He could not account for this feeling of conviction, for the only circumstance at all tending towards it was the broken skylight, and the fugitives might easily enough have broken it in the progress over the roofs.

CHAPTER CCCXXV.

MISS BLOGG DISCOVERS JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN IN THEIR HIDING-PLACE, AND RECALLS WILD TO THE SCENE OF ACTION.

Miss Blogg had for the last few moments been completely overcome by the offer which had been made to her.

To think that she should really have had the enormous sum of two hundred pounds offered to her for doing something which she was very willing but not able to accomplish, was maddening in the extreme.

She did nothing but glare at Wild, with open mouth, and continued to do so when he mounted the chair and from thence sprang on to the roof.

At length the thief-taker, convinced that he should do no good by remaining, and fearful that he should fail in his attempt to capture the fugitives, after all the trouble he had taken, stalked away, followed by his men.

The roof-tops were dark and silent, and as he gazed around he could nowhere see the faintest trace of those he sought.

But he pushed onwards.

Even after his departure Miss Blogg continued to stare vacantly at the spot upon which the thief-taker had so recently stood.

The skylight still lay back upon the tiles, with its glass in a terribly shattered condition.

Of this, however, she was oblivious; and so, too, was she of the cold night wind which poured in at the large aperture, and caused the candles in the huge chandelier to gutter away at a great rate.

Presently, however, she recovered herself.

Turning round, she bent the most withering looks upon the unfortunate girls, who stood still huddled together in attitudes of terror.

As she looked upon them, Miss Blogg became herself again.

"Well—well, to be sure!" she exclaimed, breaking out into her usual incoherent style of conversation. "Very well, indeed! I wonder what, in a manner of speaking, will happen. Yes! Oh, it doesn't matter a straw. Of course, we are all independent of our labour, thank heaven! and it don't matter a cuss whether we work or whether we doesn't! We can stand up, and there is no occasion for us to work whatsomever! Oh, dear no! I should not! Not at all, of course!"

Now what was meant by this speech, uttered as it was with a rapidity that did credit to her vocal powers, a stranger would most likely have been puzzled to know.

His bewilderment would have been increased if he found, as was actually the case, that she appeared to address her random remarks to no one in particular, and made scarcely any pause between her unconnected sentences.

Her hearers, however, were accustomed to her peculiar style of delivery.

They understood only too well what she meant.

Miss Blogg uttered these words in a tone which she intended should be highly ironical.

She alluded to the poor slaves, who, while the preceding scene had taken place, had suspended work, and had not resumed their tasks when she turned round.

The reason was, they everyone shook with fear, for they dreaded that the two fugitives would yet be discovered.

This seemed extremely likely.

The heap of calico garments, beneath which Jack and Blueskin were so inartificially hidden, was the joint labour of all the girls in the room.

It was a portion of Miss Blogg's duty to inspect this work—which the reader may depend she took particular pains to do.

It was scarcely likely that she would go down again out of the room without examining the work, and taking it down with her.

If she did this, and they had scarcely any doubts upon the point, the discovery of the fugitives would be certain. Then what was to become of them?

The threats which the thief-taker had with so much malevolence pronounced were far from being despised by them.

They had a very exaggerated idea of Wild's power

His words still rung in their ears, and their whole bodies trembled and shook so that it was entirely impossible to hold anything with the least degree of steadiness.

The piercing gaze which Miss Blogg bent upon them only increased these symptoms.

The forewoman having, as she considered, allowed sufficient time for her last discourse to produce its full effects, spoke again:

"Very nice goings on they are to be sure! Taking, in a manner of speaking, all things together! Well, we shall see what will become of it. How pleasant! Two hundred pounds! I wish I could see the rascals—I would call Mr. Wild back pretty quick. Two hundred pounds! Dear me! I can't help thinking what a nice man he is; and that squirt of his makes him really delightful! We shall see what's to be done. Where's the work? Oh! in the corner, there. Of course there's not so much done as there ought to be! Oh, you wretches, if I only had you to deal with instead of your dear, delightful, amiable, angelic mistress, I'd pretty soon let you know what was what—that I would! And that is all the work done? Of course, we are all above our employment! I know that perfectly well! But still I know my duty; and I'll do it!"

With these triumphant and high-minded words upon her lips, Miss Blogg crossed the work-room and made her way towards the corner in which the work was piled up.

As a matter of course, our two friends had not missed hearing a single word of all that had been said during the whole of the time they had been in their strange place of concealment.

As for the danger with which they were now threatened, they only partially comprehended it.

But they heard the sharp, quick tread of the forewoman as she came towards the corner.

They prepared themselves for the discovery which they made up their minds must now take place.

The poor needlewomen sat looking on in dumb suspense. Had their lives depended upon it they could neither have spoken nor stirred.

They were just as though some sudden stroke of enchantment had turned them into stone.

Stooping down, Miss Blogg spread out her arms and prepared to lift the heap of clothes up at once.

She started and paused, however, for at the moment she was about to touch them a faint cry struck upon her ears, which was immediately followed by the heavy fall of something.

Looking up to ascertain the cause, she saw that one of the "hands," as she called them, lay prostrate on the floor.

The poor creature, completely overcome by what had occurred and the discovery which was threatened to be made that instant, had fainted.

That was so common an occurrence in the work-room, that it extorted nothing more than a passing glance from Miss Blogg.

Once again she set about the execution of her interrupted purpose.

With a grand sweep she caught hold of the clothes.

What was her horror upon discovering that the clothes, instead of being soft and yielding, as she expected to find them, contained some hard substance.

The truth flashed upon her mind with the suddenness of lightning.

A shrill and ear-piercing shriek came from her lips.

Dropping the clothes of which she had taken hold, she rushed towards the skylight and sprang upon the chair.

By this time Blueskin and Jack Sheppard, finding all further hope of concealment entirely at an end, rose rapidly to their feet.

Both were much invigorated and refreshed by the rest they had had, and they felt themselves equal to another struggle for freedom, should it be requisite.

Jack saw in a moment the danger which would result

from the extraordinary proceedings of Miss Blogg if she were allowed to go on unchecked.

The forewoman, having sprang upon the chair, caught hold of the lowest edge of the skylight, and began to make numerous violent efforts to draw herself up on to the roof, quite heedless of everything but the notion that she was about to earn two hundred pounds.

Before Jack could reach the chair, so great was her speed that she had almost succeeded in scrambling out on to the tiles.

Only two thin legs remained visible.

But these were enough for Jack.

Jumping upon the chair, he caught hold of both a little way above the ankle, and then, exerting all the downward pressure he could, he pulled her back into the room.

At finding her legs seized in this dreadful manner, Miss Blogg uttered a scream, and when she thought of the appearance she must present to those below, all her strength deserted her.

Discovering this, Jack nimbly stepped aside, and the forewoman reached the floor with a bang sufficient to shake the house to its foundation.

At the same moment there came the loud report of a pistol, and Blueskin narrowly escaped the bullet which had been aimed at him.

The shot had been fired by Jonathan Wild.

He had not been able to altogether get rid of his previously formed conviction; and though he applied himself vigorously to the search, he could not help keeping round the skylight, just as a moth will flutter round a flame.

At the time when Miss Blogg made her desperate attempt to rush after him he was several yards off.

The scream, however, to which she gave utterance reached his ears with great plainness.

Turning round, he found the cry had proceeded from the direction of the work-room, and he considered it to be amply sufficient to warrant his turning back.

He made all speed.

He arrived just when Jack dragged Miss Blogg so violently back into the room.

Then the first object which met his view was Blueskin standing in the middle of the room.

With the speed of thought he levelled the pistol he held in his hand, and pulled the trigger.

But Blueskin happening to move just as he fired, his aim was balked, and our old friend escaped without sustaining the least injury.

Things had now come to a crisis.

Speechless with surprise and terror at the extraordinary scene which was taking place before them, the poor needlewomen neither moved hand nor foot.

As for our two friends, they knew full well the time had arrived for rapid action, and they were thankful to think they had rested sufficiently to recover in some degree their late fatigue.

Blueskin held a pistol in his hand, and as soon as the thief-taker fired, and before that worthy could execute his purpose of once more jumping down into the work-room, he returned the shot he had received.

Whether it was effectual or not he could not tell, for the attic was completely filled with the blue smoke produced by the discharge.

Ere the echoes of Blueskin's shot had died away, there was a third report.

It was Jack who had fired.

Immediately after he had dragged Miss Blogg down he produced from his pocket the pistol he had the moment before consigned to it, and though he could not take anything like an accurate aim, he fired as well as he could in the direction of the skylight.

The repeated concussion of the air had, one after the other, extinguished the candles in the chandelier, and now total darkness prevailed.

Without further loss of time, or attempting to strike another blow, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard made their way in the direction of the door which afforded egress from the attic.

They had carefully noted its position, and reached it without difficulty.

The sound of men jumping down through the skylight, and a chorus of piercing shrieks, caused them to make fresh exertions.

Favoured by the darkness, they were yet in hopes of being able to make their escape.

The door opened to their touch.

Passing through it like shadows, they closed it after them.

Unfortunately, however, there were no means by which it could be even temporarily secured.

It was necessary that they should feel about them carefully for the stairs; but when once they commenced the descent, they would be able to make good speed.

It so happened that the head of the stairs was very close indeed to the attic door.

Down they went, then, holding the balustrades for assistance.

The floor beneath was quickly reached, and the descent of the next flight of stairs commenced.

Just then they heard the attic door flung open.

A glare of light from the torches carried, and the trampling of many feet, immediately followed, showing the energy of their pursuers to be undiminished.

The two fugitives increased their speed, and, with feet scarcely touching the stairs, reached the second landing.

More stairs were below them, and down these they sped until the landing on the first floor was reached.

No sooner had they reached here, however, than a door was flung open with great violence.

A stream of bright light poured through this door on to the landing.

A man appeared, and endeavoured to intercept the progress of the fugitives.

"Help, help!" he cried. "Thieves! Murder! Fire! Thieves! Help, help!"

"Take that," said Jack, "and don't in future mix yourself up in other people's affairs."

As he spoke he struck this man a violent blow on the head with the butt-end of the pistol he had so recently discharged.

CHAPTER CCCXXVI.

JACK SHEPPARD HITS UPON A CAPITAL SCHEME, AND SUCCEEDS IN THOROUGHLY BAFFLING HIS FOES.

A VERY ominous crack was the result of this blow; and the man, with a wild sort of shriek which was checked before it was half uttered, fell headlong down the stairs, his body striking with a sickening crash against the wall.

This interruption, although it had taken so little time, was yet sufficient to let their pursuers gain rapidly upon them; and Jack could not help admitting that their chances were less than they were a little while before.

The fall of the man down the stairs could not fail to attract the notice of those who happened to be on the ground floor.

Whether they would encounter any enemies at the foot of the stairs another moment would decide.

The man lay there as still as though in death.

Leaping down two or three steps at a time went the fugitives.

The bottom of the stairs was reached.

No one appeared.

They cleared the prostrate body with a leap.

Before them was a half glass door.

They peeped through it.

It looked into a shop where linen garments of every description appeared to be sold.

A woman was standing behind the counter.

Her face was turned towards the glass door as though she had been alarmed by hearing something.

More than this the two fugitives did not and dared not wait to see.

If they had lingered they would eventually have been overtaken.

Suddenly they dashed open the door of the shop and rushed in.

The female behind the counter uttered a shriek, and disappeared from view.

Altogether heedless of her, Jack and Blueskin rushed across the shop, and in a second were in the street.

The hour was a late one.

At the time of which we write the early closing movement had not been thought of, and certain classes of shops remained open at a much later hour than they do at present.

This shop was one of the late ones.

There was not another open in the street except the public-house at the corner.

It was verging upon midnight.

With a rush, then, our two friends gained the street just as those who had followed them down the stairs burst into the shop.

But the fugitives were menaced with a fresh danger, the probability of encountering which Jack had overlooked.

Scarcely had they gained the middle of the street, and before they set off in any direction, than they heard someone cry:

"There they are—there they are! After them!—we shall have them yet! Hurrah!"

A rush of many feet followed these words, and a number of men who had stationed themselves in the street, in the hope of seeing them emerge from one of the houses, took up the chase.

Again, then, did it seem as though our friends were to be subjected to the terrible ordeal of being hunted like wild beasts through the streets of London.

They had no resource but to fly with all the speed they could command.

As a matter of course, they chose a direction opposite to that taken by their foes.

With unabated speed they swept onwards.

The streets were quite deserted.

This was to them both an advantage and a disadvantage.

It was an advantage so far as not meeting with any impediments to their progress was concerned; but then it made them all the more conspicuous—and here was the disadvantage, for they would be all the more easily followed.

By this time those who had rushed into the shop had emerged into the street and joined in the ranks of those who were in full pursuit.

The cries they raised were sufficient to rouse all London, but nearly the whole of the population was in bed, and so they did not obtain such reinforcements to their ranks as they would have done at an earlier hour.

"Round the next corner, Blueskin!" said Jack in a low tone to his companion as they hurried onward almost deprived of breath. "Round the next corner, my friend, and then round the next! We must try to baffle them in that way, for I am convinced we shall never outrun them."

Blueskin's breath was too far spent to allow him to reply to his conductor's speech, but he nevertheless fully understood what he said.

The next corner was only a few yards distant.

They dashed round it, and were out of sight of their pursuers.

Fortunately for them, another corner was close at hand.

Round this they swept, still keeping by that means out of sight.

Jack directed Blueskin's attention to another corner which it would be desirable to turn, because then they would be more likely to baffle their foes, who, however, they could hear, were much closer to them than was at all pleasant.

"Now for a place of shelter!" said Jack, as they turned this last corner. "Moderate your pace so as not to excite suspicion. Ah, look! On the opposite side of the road there is the very thing we require."

He ran across the street as he spoke.

Blueskin was rather bewildered, for he could not make out what fresh scheme had entered his companion's brain.

He was not long kept in suspense, however.

On reaching the other side, Jack reduced his pace to a walk.

Blueskin did the same.

About a couple of yards before them was a tailor's shop. The interior and the windows were brightly lighted up.

A boy was, however, actively engaged in closing the premises for the night.

"In here, Blueskin!" said Jack, as they reached the door. "We are saved at last!"

These words were comforting ones to hear, but Blueskin hardly dared trust himself to believe them.

He did not hesitate, however, to follow Jack Sheppard into the shop.

He had great faith in his young companion's abilities to do all that he said he could.

They then entered the shop as ordinary customers might.

As soon as they were fairly inside, Jack felt he was safe.

He uttered in a whisper a brief and energetic command to his companion:

"Feign to be just a little drunk," he said, "and leave the rest to me! Act your part well, and I will guarantee not only to baffle those who are after us, but to procure a first-rate disguise as well!"

Jack ceased.

A glimmering of his plan now dawned upon Blueskin's mind.

At this moment a man entered the shop from an inner room.

He came up to the counter at which our friends stood, and desired to learn their pleasure.

Jack put on the air of one who has drank rather too freely, but who is still sober.

"Sorry to trouble you so late at night," he said, with a hiccup, and reeling slightly; "but, curse it all, I have slipped down in the mud, and so has my friend! Just look at our clothes!"

And he laughed unmeaningly, and as intoxicated men do laugh, as he finished speaking.

In this laugh Blueskin joined, as though it was the best joke in the world to fall down and soil their clothes.

"What's the odds?" he said, addressing the shopkeeper. "If these things are spoiled—(hiccup)—I say, where's the odds? There's more clothes in London that are not spoiled, and we have got the money to pay for them, haven't we, my boy?"

He, too, concluded his speech with a drunken laugh.

The shopkeeper was quite deceived.

He had not a very good principle, that tailor.

Had they been ordinary customers on such an errand, he would have told them they were too late to attend to that night.

But as they were drunk he thought he should have a good chance of fleecing them by passing off an indifferent article, and charging an exorbitant price for it.

They would know no better, he told himself, and on the morrow they would probably be puzzled to recollect anything of the affair.

Now, this was what Jack had counted upon, and he was right in his calculation.

Perhaps he had had some experience of the honesty of London tradesmen under such circumstances.

Whether that was so or not, he was certainly quite correct.

To conciliate his customers, the tailor joined in Blueskin's laugh, whereat the latter swore, with an oath, he was a downright good fellow.

"Will you please to walk this way, into the inner room, gentlemen, where we can take your measure? The boy is closing the shop, but that don't matter. When you are suited, we can let you out at the side door."

"Of course you can!" replied Jack, with tipsy jollity. "What a crib you have got! When you have suited us with a suit you will let us out at the side door! Ha, ha!"

This was esteemed so good a joke that the two indulged in a boisterous fit of laughter, to the infinite astonishment of the boy who was putting up the shutters.

No one, to have seen Jack and Blueskin acting their parts, and taking things so easily as they did, would for one moment have imagined how close their pursuers were behind them.

When Jack perpetrated the sorry joke of being suited with a suit, his quick ear detected the sounds which indicated the rapid approach of his pursuers.

Most anxious was he to reach the inner room, where they would certainly be safe.

But he did not show the least trace of that anxiety.

Nearer came the shouts and cries, and trampling of feet.

The tailor led the way into the inner room, and was closely followed by the two fugitives.

Blueskin came last, and, as if by accident, he gave the door through which they had just passed a push.

It closed with a bang.

At that very moment, an excited, furious crowd, shouting and yelling, tore by, and the boy dropped a shutter in his alarm.

They were Jack's pursuers.

There was nothing in the tailor's shop to arrest their attention, and they swept onwards like a mighty sea.

"There seems to be a bit of a row in the street, eh?"

said Jack, with a laugh, which he checked suddenly with a hiccup. "I wonder what it's all about! Let's go and see, eh, old boy?"

"Ha, ha!" responded Blueskin, who understood his companion perfectly. "More fun! Let's go and see the lark!"

"Nay, nay!" said the tailor, who felt at first an unaccountable suspicion that his late customers were in some way connected with the hubbub outside, but who now banished the idea completely in consequence of Jack's admirable presence of mind in acting as he did. "Nay, nay! It is impossible for any gentleman to go out while in such a condition as you now are! If you will step this way I will show you some garments."

"Ha, ha! Of course!" said Jack. "Why, old boy, you forget we were not suited with a suit yet! Ha, ha!"

And again they laughed tremendously. This time they could do it with better spirit and effect, for they considered that at last the termination of the night's troubles had been reached.

Whether they were right we shall presently see.

With a staggering gait they made their way towards the counter, upon which were several articles of ready-made clothing.

It was too soon to put off the mask yet; and Jack, who thoroughly understood the motive by which the tailor was actuated, determined, ere he departed, to punish him for his rapacity and meanness.

The clothes which the tailor placed for their inspection were of the cheapest and commonest description; but our friends said nothing about that, because it afforded them all the better chance of disguising themselves.

They allowed, in fact, the tailor to select a suit for them; and so accustomed was he to his trade, that after taking the measure of them with his eyes, he could tell what garments would fit them.

Taking the bundle up, he carried it into an inner room, where they could change them for those they had on.

Our friends entered this room, and quickly re-apparelled themselves.

They did not address each other or throw off their half-tipsy manner, for fear the tailor should be either peeping or listening.

It was well they took this precaution, for the unprincipled shopkeeper was listening and peeping too.

As soon as they had finished, and transferred the contents of their pockets, which they were careful to do as secretly as they could—for they by no means wished it to be known that they were so well armed as they were—they emerged into the room, where they found the tailor waiting for them.

A glance showed the two comrades that the shop was closed, and most of the lights in it were extinguished.

The street, too, was quite quiet.

Their hopes increased, and had the tailor exhibited a proper spirit they would have been inclined to deal with him liberally, as the means by which they had escaped their foes.

But his rapacity they determined should be punished.

"How much for the clothes?" asked Jack.

"Ten guineas each suit!" said the tailor, with a bow.

Jack did not show the least surprise or dissatisfaction at this exorbitant price, but continued in his rollicking tipsy character.

His pockets were well lined with money, thanks to his adventure with Sir William, so he drew out a purse and counted twenty guineas, one after another, into the tailor's hands, whose eyes sparkled with avaricious pleasure as coin after coin descended into his palm.

With a sigh of satisfaction he consigned the money to his pocket.

He had, he considered, done a good night's work.

The clothes he had just sold for twenty guineas cost him about two; but then what were drunken men to know about the matter?

Anxiously he led them to the side door, whither our friends followed him with great alacrity.

As soon as the door was opened, Jack cast an anxious gaze up and down the street.

Not a soul was in sight.

The tailor stood upon the door-step, and wished them good night.

Now was the moment.

Jack threw off his assumed manner in a second.

He grasped a pistol in his coat-pocket, and he now drew it forth with great suddenness and clapped it to the tailor's temples before that individual knew what it was.

Jack pressed the muzzle of the barrel with painful tightness into his flesh.

"Do you know what that is?" said Jack.

Then, without giving the tailor time to open his mouth or to move, he added:

"It's a pistol! Now utter a word, or move, and I will blow the roof of your head off! The pistol is loaded to the muzzle!"

Then turning to Blueskin, he said, rapidly:

"Empty his pockets, and lose no time about it!"

CHAPTER CCCXXVII.

EDGORTH BESS AT LENGTH FINDS HERSELF FACE TO FACE WITH HER PRESERVER.

As lightly as foot could fall the richly dressed young man approached the conspicuous female.

The reader will recollect that when we saw her last she was standing at the bedside of the poor persecuted heiress, Edgorth Bess, who was sleeping peacefully.

She had beckoned to this young nobleman, as his dress indicated him to be, and in accordance with her invitation he had stepped into the room.

She whispered to him to be silent, but her caution was not needed.

With the noiselessness of a shadow he glided over the soft, yielding carpet, and in another moment he stood by the side of the bed.

The conspicuous female grasped his arm with one hand, and with the other held back the curtains in such a manner that the rosy lamplight showed with full effect upon the sleeper.

Very beautiful she looked while slumbering deeply.

Her face, in the artificial light which flooded the chamber, no longer wore its natural deathly white appearance.

It was now faintly overspread with a slight carnation tinge, which enhanced her beauty in a wonderful degree.

Her neck and one fair arm were visible.

The proportion and shape of both were perfect.

An expression of rapture came over the countenance of the young man, and as he gazed he clasped his hands together.

Up to that moment he had never seen anything so truly beautiful.

It was like gazing on some lovely vision.

He did not speak.

All his faculties were absorbed by the spectacle before him.

With an eager eye the conspicuous female noted the effect which this exerted upon him; and, if her countenance could be trusted, she appeared well satisfied with the result.

As though she thought he had gazed enough, she endeavoured to draw him away.

But he resisted, nor could the strength which she put forth move him in the least.

He seemed spell-bound.

"Enough, enough!" she said, in a faint but energetic whisper. "You have lingered long enough! She may wake, and then——"

"Peace, peace!" said the young man, speaking in the same tone.

At this moment Edgorth Bess, roused probably by the whispering, started violently, and awoke.

As her eyes unclosed they rested for a second upon the form of the young man.

It was, however, but a momentary glimpse which she obtained, for the conspicuous female instantly released her hold on the curtains, and the descending drapery hid him from her sight.

The conspicuous female drew the young man backwards, and made him an imperative sign to retire.

Reluctantly he obeyed.

But she persisted, and he was compelled to withdraw.

"What is that?" exclaimed Edgorth Bess, faintly.

"Who is there?"

She partially raised herself upon one arm as she spoke.

The conspicuous female appeared.

"Don't be alarmed," she said. "It's all right. It's only me."

"I saw someone else besides yourself," replied Edgorth Bess.

"Hush, hush!"

"But I did!"

"Hush, hush! Don't excite yourself."

"I am not exciting myself; but tell me who it was that I saw. It was a young man!"

The conspicuous female nodded.

"Who is he?" asked Edgorth Bess, whose mind was filled with vague and undefined alarm.

"Your preserver!" was the reply, uttered in a low voice.

"My preserver!" ejaculated Edgorth Bess; and then, thoroughly surprised, she found herself unable to proceed further.

The conspicuous female repeated her statement.

Edgorth Bess was surprised.

Somehow or other, she knew not how, the idea had taken possession of her mind that her unknown benefactor was of the female and not of the male sex.

The idea that it could be to a young man that she was indebted never once occurred to her; and now that the notion was so suddenly presented to her she could not help being overwhelmed with surprise.

"That young gentleman!" she exclaimed, in tones which expressed the astonishment she felt. "Can it be possible that it is to him I owe so heavy a debt of gratitude?"

"Why not?" asked the conspicuous female.

This was rather an unanswerable question, and Edgorth Bess was unable to reply to it.

She could not think why not.

"Where is he? Call him back!" said Edgorth Bess, a moment afterwards. "Yet stay!" she added; "why should he come here while I was sleeping?"

"He was anxious to know how far you had progressed towards recovery. When he entered he did not know you were sleeping. You awoke the moment he reached the bedside."

"Then, why did he retire?"

"He knew your weak state, and was afraid to excite you."

"Oh, call him back—call him back, I entreat you, that I may thank him!"

"Nay, nay! There is time enough for that. Be patient. When you are stronger and better able to thank him will be a more fitting time."

"No, no!" exclaimed the deluded girl. "Now—let me see him now, while a sense of his benefits is fully present to me."

"It is too late; he has gone! Besides, he would be better pleased to hear your thanks when you are well; you must preserve them until then."

With a sigh of disappointment, Edgorth Bess sank back upon her pillow.

"Rest—rest!" said the conspicuous female; "in a few days you will be well. You can return then, and thank him."

"I feel much better."

"Rest—rest!" was the monotonous reply. "It is rest that you require."

As she spoke, the conspicuous female, who showed palpable signs of being tired of the conversation, withdrew, taking care, as before, to close the door after her.

Again Edgorth Bess strove to think.

The reader, being already in possession of the true facts of the case, will probably feel suspicions of the conspicuous female rapidly increase.

It is quite certain that what she told the poor girl about the richly dressed young man being her deliverer was quite untrue, since she herself conveyed her to her present place of abode.

What could be her motives for such conduct time will unfold.

She was joined on the outside by the nobleman—for such he was in title and by the accident of birth—and the pair descended the staircase in earnest conversation.

In vain Edgorth Bess strove to think clearly, and assure herself that all was well.

Her mind was agitated with vague alarm, to which with all her efforts she could give no sort of consistency or form.

From the first she had been mistrustful of the conspicuous female.

There seemed something very suspicious about her.

Then the young man?

Could it be possible, she asked herself, that he had rescued her?

He looked far more like the owner of the room than the woman did.

And yet, somehow, she could not bring herself to believe it.

In this manner time passed away.

Days elapsed.

During this time she grew rapidly better.

Nothing ailed her but want of food and rest, and as these wants were supplied, she quickly became herself.

She inquired repeatedly after the young man she had seen, for the poor girl was anxious to pour out her thanks for what he had done.

Evasive answers were, however, given her, and she was put off from time to time.

At length, about a week after she had first seen the young man, she felt so far better, and was considered to be so much better by the conspicuous female, as to be allowed to get up.

Upon leaving her bed she was unable to find the ragged and dirt-bedraggled garments which she had last worn.

In their place were some garments fitted, from their style and make, to be worn by a lady.

These, however, she for a long time refused to put on.

The conspicuous female with much difficulty overcame her scruples, and in the end induced her to put them on.

"It was by the wish of her preserver," she said, "that the apparel had been brought in place of her own, and he would be much pained if she refused to put it on."

An artful appeal to her gratitude settled the matter, and the poor girl reluctantly yielded.

She placed the garments on, one after the other, with a feeling of great distrust.

But she did not know how to refuse, and then all her inquiries for her own clothing were not attended to.

She was, then, in a manner of speaking, compelled to act thus, having no other choice left her than to remain in bed.

To this she had the greatest objection.

She was impatient in the extreme, and longed to renew her search for Jack Sheppard, who all this time must, she felt confident, have been suffering the utmost uneasiness and suspense on her account.

She therefore arrayed herself in the rich apparel, and which should have been her daily dress.

She could not help being struck herself by the great and extraordinary change in her appearance.

Her charms, instead of being hidden as they had been, were now displayed to the utmost advantage.

How she wished, as she stood before the tall dressing-glass we have described and surveyed her full figure, that Jack could see her now.

The feeling was a natural one—for where is the girl who is not desirous of appearing to the greatest advantage in her lover's eyes?

The subject of her thoughts called up a brilliant flush to her cheeks.

It was at this moment that the conspicuous female entered the bedchamber.

A grunt of approval at the appearance of Edgworth Bess announced her arrival.

With a feeling of dislike which she could not repress, the young girl turned round.

The conspicuous female was profuse in her admiration and loud in her expression of it.

Edgworth Bess found it impossible to check the torrent of her eloquence upon this subject.

We spare the reader the infliction.

At length she exhausted herself, and then she inquired whether Edgworth Bess was willing and prepared to see her preserver.

This was what the deceived girl had been anxiously looking for, and she immediately signified her assent.

"Follow me, then!" said the conspicuous female, "and I will take you to him!"

"Take me to him!"

"Yes!"

"Will he not come here?"

"What, here in the bedchamber?"

"Pardon me!" exclaimed Bess, in confusion. "I forgot."

"Oh, never mind, there's no harm done! Follow me! He is not far off!"

As she spoke she took hold of Edgworth Bess by the hand, though this was a mode of conducting her which the young girl would gladly enough have dispensed with.

She did not like to resist.

She was thus led out of the bedchamber into a spacious landing from which many other doors opened.

Edgworth Bess looked with curiosity and delight upon all she saw, for of course when she was conveyed from the hackney coach to the bed-room she had no consciousness of the scenes through which she passed.

Everything she saw was magnificent in the extreme.

High above her head she could see the summit of the staircase, which was arched over into a handsome dome.

The balustrades were most elegantly carved and gilt, and the stairs were beautifully carpeted.

Down these they passed until the first floor was reached.

A door was then opened, and the heiress was ushered by her companion into a sumptuously furnished apartment, which was in perfect harmony with all she had previously seen.

The apartment was vacant, and upon making this unexpected discovery she bent an inquiring look upon her companion's countenance.

"It's all right, my dear," was the reply, given in her usual thick, unctuous accents. "Go in and wait a few moments, and he you so much wish to see will soon make his appearance."

Uttering these words the conspicuous female retreated, leaving Edgworth Bess standing alone in that magnificent apartment, and with rather a bewildered feeling about her heart and brain.

According to what seemed to be her unvarying custom, the conspicuous female locked the door after her.

Edgworth Bess noticed this, and her uneasiness increased.

Fancying she had not heard aright, she went to the door of the room and tried to open it.

But it was fast.

Her heart fluttered painfully.

What could be the meaning of all this?

She gazed around her, but nothing reassuring met her view.

Everywhere articles of the utmost value and elegance could be seen, and the whole aspect of the place was that of a palace.

To Edgworth Bess, however, it was that of a prison.

She could not trust herself to sit down, and scarcely to move.

She stood close to the locked door, in an attitude of eager listening.

But no approaching footsteps reached her ear.

When the young man appeared, however, she resolved to ask him the meaning of this extraordinary conduct.

While her thoughts were thus engaged she was suddenly startled by hearing a slight sound in a distant portion of the apartment.

She looked in that direction instantly.

To her astonishment she saw the same richly dressed young man at the extremity of the spacious chamber.

His sudden appearance gave her a slight shock of surprise, for how he had contrived to enter she could not conceive.

CHAPTER CCCXXVIII.

EDGWORTH BESS AT LAST BEGINS TO REALISE HER DANGER.

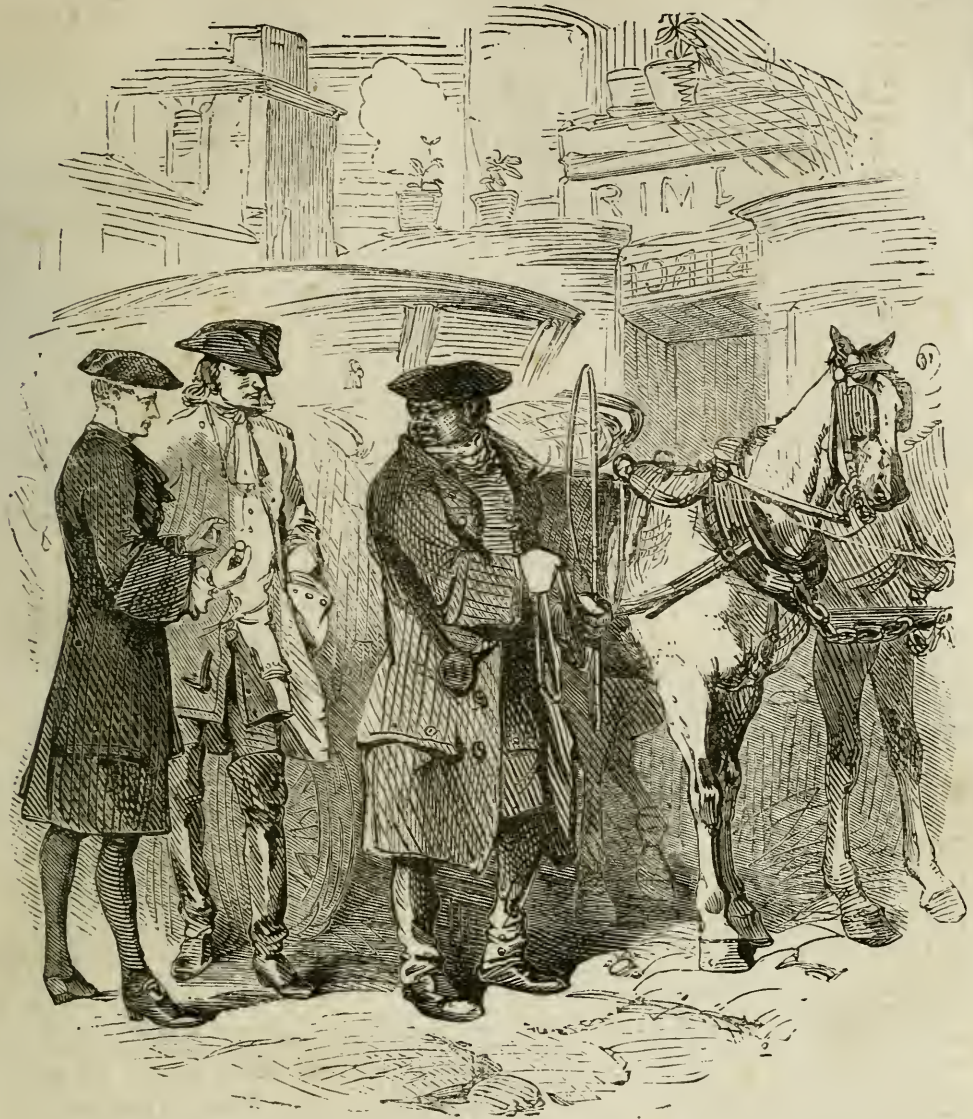
THE explanation of his seemingly mysterious appearance was, however, ample enough.

At the end of the apartment, opposite to that in which the door was situated by which Edgworth Bess had entered, was another door, and this the young girl had not had time to observe.

With a smile on his lip, and a confident, smiling expression upon his whole countenance, which she was pained and alarmed to see, this young man, with extended hands, advanced towards her.

By his attitude it seemed as though he was about to clasp her in his arms.

At any rate, the manner in which he came forward to



BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD OBTAIN A CLUE TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF EDGWORTH BESS.

greet her was peculiar, and certainly not such as Edgworth Bess had anticipated.

She felt terrified, and those vague feelings of alarm which had so long oppressed her sprang up with redoubled force in her mind.

She shrank back.

Heedless of this manifestation, however, the young man hastened on.

Edgworth Bess could not avoid taking a good look at him.

He was a young man upon whom few, if any, of the softer sex could have looked without experiencing a more or less intense degree of emotion.

He was eminently handsome.

His countenance was glowing with health, and his bright eyes sparkled with excitement.

Their lustre was scarcely inferior to that of the many ornaments which adorned his person.

His dress was very rich and magnificent, and exhibited a thoroughly good taste.

No. 66.

The times, we suppose, have for ever gone by when the titled and the wealthy will exhibit the rich appearance which they did a century and a quarter ago.

Their different ranks in life were distinguished by the dress, but now no perceptible distinction is made.

Rings of great brightness glittered on this young man's fingers; but they were only occasionally seen, for the lace ruffles round his wrists almost hid his hands from view.

By his side he wore a light dress sword, such as in those days no gentleman was ever seen without.

The scabbard and the belt, which were real objects of beauty, glittered and blazed with diamonds and various other precious stones, with which they were encrusted.

His attire almost wholly consisted of dark crimson velvet, and on his head he wore a flowing white peruke, in accordance with the unvarying fashion.

This imparted to his frank, open countenance a particularly pleasing expression.

With animation beaming from every feature and visible in every gesture, he hurried forward.

Edgworth Bess, however, was not prepared to be greeted so warmly.

She retreated rapidly.

The young man, apparently undaunted, came on with the same easy, confident smile upon his lips.

"Was this the being to whom she had to express her gratitude?" Edgworth Bess asked herself. "Was this the demeanour of a preserver—of one who, from pure and disinterested motives, had rescued her from destitution?"

She shuddered at this question mentally presented itself to her.

With an effort she summoned courage to speak.

"Hold, sir!" she said.

There was something so decisive in the tones of her voice that the young man came to a halt at once, and the expression of his face somewhat changed.

"What is the matter, my charmer?" he said. "Is it possible that the harsh words I have just heard proceeded from that rosy mouth, which should only be the means of expressing the most ardent love?"

The alarm of Edgworth Bess increased.

"Sir," she said, with native dignity, "I do not understand you!"

"Come, come! this is nothing but an artificial coyness, and doubtless the part which you are now playing has been well studied. But with me it will have no effect! I am too old a hand to be ensnared by such a device! Come, my little charmer, if you wish to please me you will throw off all those little airs and graces—they don't become you, I assure you they do not. Come, now, I can tell you that we shall be the best of friends!"

As he concluded this speech, to which Edgworth Bess listened with mingled incredulity and horror, he called up the same smile to his lips, and renewed his advance to her.

In another moment he would have caught her in his arms—for at first Edgworth Bess was so far overcome as to be unable to stir—but his proximity restored her powers of volition, and she darted away from him with the agility and speed of a fawn.

There was an elegant chair near her, and behind this she sprang, holding it before her in such a manner as to keep off her admirer.

"Hold, sir!" she cried again, in the same startling and decisive tones as had before made such an impression upon him. "Hold, sir! I have heard you without interruption, and I must beg of you to listen to what I have got to say, without you interrupting me."

At this address, so entirely different to what he had expected, the young man's countenance became the picture of amazement.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked. "I'll be hanged if I can understand it!"

"I will tell you, sir, if you will listen, and if you will remain where you now are," replied Edgworth Bess. "There is no need for you to come any closer to me than you are at present."

"Come, my charmer," exclaimed the young man, "let us have an end of this sort of thing—it always tires me."

"Nay, nay, sir; I am convinced that you, like myself, are labouring under some mistake."

"Mistake?"

"Yes; and you would quickly understand it, if you would only attend for a few moments to what I wish to say; I crave your attention for no longer period."

"Go on, my charmer, I will listen to you; but not at this distance."

"Yes—yes!"

"But I say, no—no! The thing is absolutely preposterous!" and as he spoke the young nobleman continued to advance.

Edgworth Bess retreated, dragging the chair after her, and still keeping her face turned towards him.

"Stand, sir, I say!" she exclaimed, and exhibiting such manifest signs of terror and distress as should have made her would-be admirer desist. "I pray you listen to me, and let this misunderstanding no longer continue."

"Ah, my dear girl, believe me, I understand everything! Come, cease this nonsense! I know what it means quite as well as you do; and if you wish to please me, you will throw off all such disguise at once, and appear before me in your true character. As I said, so lovely a mouth as yours was never formed to utter aught but love; and, need I add, that such lovely arms as you

display are fitted only to embrace a lover? Come—come; we have had enough of this! Throw off this disguise at once."

Thus far did the young nobleman proceed in his speech uninterrupted.

The reason was that Edgworth Bess was too overwhelmed with bewilderment to be able to make any reply.

She thought that one of them must be mad.

The closer approach, however, of the young man aroused her, and with eyes sparkling with indignation, she exclaimed:

"Hold, sir! Once more—hold! Once more I implore—I entreat you to listen to me! You wear the costume of a gentleman—prove to me that you are one by listening to my request."

At this address the young man looked at Edgworth Bess with great surprise, but his assurance coming to his aid, he concluded that this was only a pretty little piece of acting, made use of for the purpose of enhancing the charms of the lovely being before him.

Accordingly, he greeted with a loud laugh that which at first attracted his attention by its seriousness.

Unabashed, then—and, on the contrary, with more assurance than before—the young man sprang forward suddenly, hoping by this means to take Edgworth Bess by surprise.

He nearly succeeded in his object.

Rapidly the young girl retreated, and this time she did not drag the chair along with her; for she felt that it would have impeded her movements to such a degree that he would have caught her instantly.

She abandoned, then, this means of defence.

With one bound she seemed to reach the other side of the apartment.

Breathless and alarmed, she leaned against the door through which the young man had gained admittance.

Her hands hung listlessly by her side.

Her lips parted with terror, and she gazed upon her persecutor—for such he was—with the utmost alarm.

Suddenly she felt her hand touch something, and her heart swelled with joy.

It was a slight, gold-headed cane, such as the young bloods of the period always carried with them.

The handle of this she grasped, and intended to hold it before her as a defence.

As she swung it rapidly through the air she felt one part of it shake, as though loose.

It is probable she would have paid no attention to this circumstance but for the fact that a portion of the elegant cane slipped off, and exposed a glittering blade.

In an instant, then, she comprehended the nature of the weapon she held in her hand, and she could not forbear uttering an exclamation of thankfulness.

The stick was one of that kind which carry, as in a sheath, a rapier blade.

Such things then were very common.

Indeed, it was scarcely safe for any person to walk the street at night without being provided with some such means of defence.

With more rapidity than one would have deemed possible, Edgworth Bess seized the lower part of the cane, which served as a scabbard for the blade, and drew it off.

The bright rapier then glittered through the air like a flash of light.

The next instant she held it up before her in an attitude admirably adapted for defence.

The young man halted.

Surprise, anger, and admiration, all strangely mingled, were visible in his looks and attitude.

Edgworth Bess spoke not, but, with her back against the door, and her eyes riveted upon his countenance, she watched his every movement, and held herself prepared to defend herself, should it be necessary.

Her resolute bearing somewhat dismayed the young man, and he hesitated about approaching nearer.

There was a gleam in the young girl's eye, which seemed to say, as plainly as words could speak, that it would be dangerous.

So he paused.

For a moment or so he was silent, and then contracting his brows into a frown, and biting his under lip, he said:

"Come, I am tired of these heroics; I have had enough

of them. Would you have me believe you are in earnest? I will give you credit for the excellence of your acting; but believe me, it is by no means to my taste, and I would fain see you in another character. Come now, throw down that foolish weapon, about the use of which you can, I am sure, know nothing, and which, I am convinced, must of necessity be highly dangerous in your hands. Let me disarm you of it, and for the remainder of the evening—"

"Once more, sir," said Edgworth Bess, with dignity and energy—"once more, sir, I command you to come no nearer, or, as you say, this weapon may prove dangerous. Of its use I may not be so ignorant as you imagine; and, therefore, I bid you beware! You seem to be under the delusive impression that I am playing a part, and that all this is feigned. Let me, however, assure you, sir, that such is not the case—I am most terribly in earnest!"

The young man halted before the sharp point of the rapier, and stood looking at her in speechless surprise, while his eyes glowed with admiration at the young girl's appearance.

Her whole soul seemed to be beaming from her face; and, with her countenance flushed, and her eyes sparkling with excitement, Edgworth Bess never looked more beautiful than she did at that moment.

As for the young man, he thought he had never beheld anything so charmingly lovely in his life.

"In earnest!" he repeated, mechanically, and scarcely knowing what he uttered.

"Yes, in earnest!" repeated Edgworth Bess. "Over and over again, I have implored you to listen to me. I am certain you are labouring under some mistake; but if you would only listen to what I have to say, you would understand everything. Once more, then, on your honour as a gentleman, I implore you to hear me!"

CHAPTER CCCXXIX.

EDGWORTH BESS RESOLVES TO PUT TRUST IN THE YOUNG NOBLEMAN.

"You are so beautiful," said the young man, clasping his hands, and fixing his glowing eyes upon our heroine, "you are so beautiful, that it lies not in my power to refuse you anything! Speak, then! Tell me that which you are so desirous to communicate. But, while you do so, let me entreat that you will no longer preserve the cruel attitude which is so unbecoming of you. Here, by my side, upon this couch, I will listen to all you have to say, even though you ended not at doomsday!"

"Sir," replied Edgworth Bess, while you hear what I have to say, our present positions must be retained. You need not fear that I shall be tedious. I shall be only too glad when this scene comes to an end."

The young man's astonishment increased, and he began, for the first time, to realise that this interview would have a widely different termination to that which he had wished for and expected.

Edgworth Bess continued:

"The other night, on waking from my sleep, I saw you standing at my bedside, and gazing upon me as you do now. You disappeared almost instantly, but not before I had seen you, and noted your countenance so well that I felt certain I should be able to recognise you in a moment. I inquired who you were, and I was informed that you were my preserver and benefactor."

"Your preserver and benefactor!" ejaculated the young man, staggering back in the intensity of his astonishment.

"Your tones express surprise," said Edgworth Bess, "and I cannot help thinking that I have been deceived. I confess I could not reconcile your behaviour towards me this evening with the impulse which prompted you to snatch a starving girl from death by destitution."

"Destitution! Good heavens! My dear girl, compose yourself! You must be mad!"

"No, I am not mad, and yet—"

Edgworth Bess interrupted herself, and passed one hand confusedly over her brow.

The events which had latterly occurred were certainly sufficient to induce the belief that her intellects were wandering.

But the present scene seemed real.

"No, I am not mad," she said, with additional calm-

ness. "I begin to see now that I have been most cruelly deceived."

"Deceived? What—how? Explain yourself!"

"I will, sir. Some days ago—I cannot say how many—I sank down, overcome with fatigue and exhaustion from want of food, upon a door-step. I felt that I could go no further, and I soon became unconscious of all that was happening around me. What happened from that moment until I awoke and found myself in the bed by the side of which you have stood, I have not the least idea. All is blank. When I awoke, I was weak; but all my wants were attended to. I soon grew stronger. The first thing I desired to know was the name of my preserver, for I had come to the conclusion, after much anxious thought upon the subject, that I must have been found upon the door-step by some kind, rich, and benevolent person, and placed where I found myself."

At these words the young man smiled faintly.

But a remarkable change had come over him.

He listened to every word which fell from the lips of Edgworth Bess with the utmost attention and interest.

"Proceed," he said, gently—"proceed! Let me hear all."

The tones of his voice and his manner were so entirely different from what they had been a short time before that Edgworth Bess looked at him with surprise.

Nevertheless, she continued:

"Having come to this conclusion, I became anxious in the extreme to see the person to whom I was so much indebted. A woman, to whom I took the deepest dislike the moment I saw her, seemed my principal attendant. To her, therefore, I addressed myself. I requested her to lose no more time in bringing me face to face with my benefactor, in order that I might pour out my gratitude and thanks, for I felt my heart full to overflowing. This she would not do. When I awoke and found you bending over me, I eagerly demanded who you were. This woman then told me that you were my preserver—that it was to you I was indebted for my preservation from death—from starvation in the streets."

"I?" ejaculated the young man, with increased surprise.

"Yes, you. But hear me out, and then you will be able to judge better, and so shall I. No sooner did I become aware of this than I was impatient in the extreme to again find myself face to face with you. But my repeated request was not attended to. At length I became strong and well enough to leave my bed. The garments which I had last worn were nowhere to be seen, and those which I now wear were in their place. At first I refused to put these on, but I was told that you—my benefactor—would be displeased if I refused, and I yielded. I was then told you were waiting for me, and I was led to this apartment. But your behaviour during our interview has been so utterly at variance with what I had expected, that I cannot come to any other conclusion than that I have been deceived. Hold off, sir!" she cried, with sudden energy, as she perceived the young man about to advance.

He halted at once, and then spoke.

"Fear nothing," he said; "I can assure you, you have no longer any occasion to fear me. Like yourself, I have been grossly deceived by Mother Robotham in this affair."

"Mother who?" inquired Edgworth Bess.

"Mother Robotham."

"Who is she?"

"The woman who keeps this house."

"The woman who keeps this house?"

"Yes."

"Can it be possible that this elegant mansion belongs to—"

"Say no more! Spare me, I pray you, the disagreeable task of stating who Mother Robotham really is, and the nature of the proceedings which are carried on in this house."

Edgworth Bess stared at him aghast.

The young man continued:

"As I said just this moment, you have not been more grossly deceived in this matter than I have. Need I tell you that I knew nothing of your history until the present moment, and that I have no claims whatever to the titles of either your preserver or benefactor?"

"Oh, heavens!"

"Nay, hear me out. It may be that in me you will find

a friend, who will see you clear of a terrible danger. I will, however, be frank with you, and I trust you will pardon, for that reason, any liberty of speech of which I may make use."

With parted lips, Edgworth Bess listened eagerly to what was about to happen next.

"You will doubtless understand me when I say that this house, kept by a woman who is known as Mother Robotham, is a place to which young men in the City of London occasionally repair in search of pleasure. I can tell by the expression of your face that you understand me. I need say no more, except that I was told of your presence here by the woman you have mentioned, and admitted to an interview with you, under the belief that you were by no means unwilling that the meeting should take place. You will now, I hope, understand my behaviour. No doubt mine has surprised you as much as yours has me."

Edgworth Bess burst into a bitter flood of tears.

"Alas—alas!" she exclaimed, in a voice broken by sobs, "By what a malignant fate am I pursued! I escape one danger only to fall into another worse. Merciful heavens! what will become of me?"

For a moment or two the young man remained silent, and allowed her grief to remain unchecked and uninterrupted with.

Then he spoke.

"If you will allow me," he said, "I will make the only reparation in my power for the injury I have done and the unhappiness I have caused you."

She fixed her tearful eyes upon him, in the endeavour to ascertain how far he was to be trusted.

But no other expression appeared upon the young man's countenance than that of candour and sincerity.

"Will you," he added, perceiving how her attention was riveted upon him, "will you allow me to repair, as well as I am able, the injury I have done you?"

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Then I will speak more plainly. It is quite evident that you are no willing inmate of this house."

"Oh, no—no!" exclaimed Edgworth Bess, with a shudder of horror.

"I knew it—but then, if I am content to take my departure, leaving you unmolested, that will not secure you from the advances of others, who perhaps might not feel disposed to listen to your words as I have done. Besides, I shudder when I think upon the fate which is almost certain to be your lot!"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the poor girl, "you fill me with even greater horror and apprehension than I have yet experienced!"

"If you remain in this house——"

"Fear not, sir, that I shall lose any time in leaving it! Do not think that I should remain in it a moment after I have parted with you!"

The young man shook his head.

"You speak in total ignorance of where you are, and the characters by whom you are surrounded. Do you think you would be allowed to quit this house? No!—they would slay you first!"

"Alas! alas!" moaned the unhappy girl. "What will become of me?"

"If you will allow me to obtain in reality the title which has already been falsely bestowed upon me—that of your deliverer—I am willing to attempt it."

"What is your meaning, sir?"

"Simple enough. Under my protection you will be able to leave this house, but by no other means. As I have told you, they would slay you rather than suffer you to depart. Under my escort, however, you will, doubtless, be able to leave this ill-omened roof. Will you place so much trust in me as to allow me the opportunity of rescuing you from this danger? Believe me, it is a more fearful one than that with which you were menaced when you sank down upon the door-step in the manner you have described!"

Edgworth Bess looked closely into the young man's countenance as he gave utterance to the preceding speech. But she could detect upon it nothing but candour and integrity of purpose.

An anxious question now presented itself to her.

Should she trust this young man?

There was unquestionably great risk in doing so; and yet, she asked herself, after what she had heard, was it

possible that she could make her position worse than it then was?

That did not seem to be possible.

Again she looked into the young man's countenance; and this time she felt even better satisfied with the result of her examination.

He spoke again.

"I shall not press you to act in the manner I have advised," he said, "lest you should place a wrong construction on my motives. If, however, you are willing to trust me, I will pledge you my honour as a gentleman—and, bad as I may have been, I have never broken my word—I say again, that if you will trust me, I will pledge you my honour to strive my utmost to free you from this horrible den."

Edgworth Bess hesitated.

She fully realised the importance of the step she was thus desired to take.

She felt fearful to decide.

And yet, the prospect of remaining where she was, with the probability of being again subjected to such an ordeal as that which she had just passed through, was so full of horror, that she felt almost decided.

Once more she looked at the young man's expressive countenance.

It remained unchanged.

She lowered the point of the weapon with which she had hitherto kept him at a distance, but very slowly. Still it was lowered.

The young man advanced.

She held out her hand towards him.

Then, in an earnest, solemn voice, she spoke.

CHAPTER CCCCXX.

EDGWORTH BESS SUCCEEDS IN LEAVING THE HOUSE IN SPRING GARDENS.

WITH his countenance beaming with undissembled pleasure, the young nobleman stepped forward a few paces, and took eagerly the hand which was extended towards him.

"I will trust you, sir!" said Edgworth Bess. "I will place reliance upon your word of honour, so solemnly given me! I hope I shall do so, and have no cause to repent it! If you are deceiving me in any way—if any treachery lurks beneath your words—then may you be deceived at the moment when you place the utmost reliance upon another!"

He shook a little at this adjuration, Edgworth Bess thought; but, if so, it was so slightly as to be scarcely perceptible.

The tones of his voice, when he replied to her, were constrained, however, and he seemed to be suffering deeply from some emotion.

"You can trust me," he said, "as you would trust yourself, or anyone who is dear to you! I shall not be false to my pledge! I cannot say that I have spent my life as I should have spent it, but I can lay my hand upon my heart and say that I never yet was guilty of a base or dishonourable action!"

The accents of truth are unmistakeable and irresistible.

Edgworth Bess, as she listened to these words, felt her confidence increase.

"Once more," she said, "I will say, I trust you, and place full reliance upon your power and good faith to save me!"

"I say it not from any desire of overrating my services," replied the young nobleman, "but you have acted very wisely. You do not—and heaven forbid you ever should—realise the full horrors of the place, or the scenes to which you would have been exposed. Aided only by yourself, you would never have been able to escape, and you would have met with a doom I shudder to contemplate! Happily, however, that is over now, and you have no longer anything to fear upon that head. Enough has been said; and it is time now for action. Arm yourself with what fortitude you are able, for we have a violent scene to go through!"

"You terrify me!"

"Nay, nay—do not be alarmed! I will take care that no harm happens to yourself!"

"But you?"

"Can it be possible that you feel an interest in my welfare?"

"Can I do otherwise? Are you not about to render me an inestimable service?"

"True—true! The speech was a foolish one; but you will quickly see that I am well able to take my own part."

"But what are you about to do?"

"That will depend greatly upon circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"Those which may arise. In the first place, I shall require you to place your hand upon my left arm, thus. I will carry the rapier in my right. I shall then proceed to leave the house. If I am allowed to do so unquestioned, why, well and good; if not, let those who seek to interrupt me look to the consequences!"

"You alarm me!" said Edgworth Bess, "and I question whether I am right in thus bringing down danger upon you!"

"Pho, pho! I feel that I owe you some reparation, and I am only too anxious to discharge the obligation. Come, lend me your hand! We will tarry here no longer. The sooner you cease to breathe the atmosphere of pollution which fills this place, the better it will be for your own purity. Come, give me your hand!"

Edgworth Bess hesitated.

Even at the last moment the dreadful question occurred to her—was she acting rightly?

She could not tell.

She felt, however, that she had no resource, and resolved to leave the result in the hands of providence, and consoled herself with the reflection that she had acted, so far as she could tell, for the best.

After this momentary struggle, she tremblingly placed her hand upon the young nobleman's arm, as he had requested.

The die was now cast, and she felt like some desperate gamster who had staked his all upon one throw.

A furtive glance at her companion's countenance somewhat reassured her.

He no longer showed the least wish of remaining in that apartment.

He strode towards the door.

It was but a few paces from them, and was not the one through which Edgworth Bess had been ushered by the conspicuous female—who, it appeared, was known by the peculiar title of Mother Robotham—but the one through which the young nobleman had passed when he entered the room unperceived by Edgworth Bess.

The other door was locked, she already knew, and she wondered whether this one was.

Her doubts were soon set at rest.

Her companion turned the handle, and the door opened to a touch.

A spacious and well-lighted corridor appeared beyond.

It seemed to be the entrance-hall of a mansion, but Edgworth Bess could tell at a glance it was not the one she had crossed when she entered the apartment where her singular interview had taken place.

With a bold and confident step, which had the effect of banishing a great deal of the timidity she felt, the young nobleman passed into this corridor, and made his way along it in a certain direction until a spacious staircase was reached, and then Edgworth Bess recollected that she was not upon the ground floor, but the first floor of the house.

Labouring under so much excitement as she had been, it is not wonderful that she should have forgotten this.

The staircase was brilliantly lighted.

Edgworth Bess glanced all round anxiously; but, to her relief, she saw nobody.

The descent of the stairs was then commenced.

She still allowed her hand to remain upon his arm, and he still held the rapier in his hand in such a position as to make immediate use of it.

In spite of herself, Edgworth Bess trembled.

Her companion perceived the tremor, and strove to reassure her.

"It is quite possible," he said, "that we shall be able to take our departure without being seen by any person."

"No, no!" said Edgworth Bess. "Look, look!"

She pointed down the staircase as she spoke.

Standing in the centre of the hall below, and only a few feet distant from the foot of the stairs, her face distorted and empurpled with mingled astonishment and

anger, was the conspicuous female—or Mother Robotham, as the young nobleman had called her.

When she saw the pair descending, she did not speak, but her whole attention seemed to be absorbed in gazing upon them.

Without wavering in the least, the young nobleman commenced the descent.

It was quite clear that he did not care much for Mother Robotham.

He held his head erect, and looked down haughtily and threateningly upon her.

She did not seem to like the look of his face, but still she did not speak, nor did she move an inch from the position she occupied.

The hall in which she stood was tolerably spacious as regarded width, but as her dimensions might truly be termed herculean, and as her dress was disproportionately distended with the stiffest of hoops, and as she had planted herself directly in the centre of the passage, it was quite clear that they could not pass without brushing her apparel.

A contact was therefore inevitable.

In a moment or so the bottom of the staircase was reached.

Still she never moved nor spoke, but her looks denoted an accession of wrath.

The young nobleman did not seem disposed to be hindered by her, or to allow her to obstruct his progress.

He raised his glittering rapier in a more threatening manner than he had done hitherto, and, in a voice so stern that Edgworth Bess scarcely recognised it, he said:

"Stand aside, woman!"

Trembling, and with difficulty preventing herself from sinking to the ground, Edgworth Bess clung to his arm, and no longer just rested upon it as she had done.

Mother Robotham took not the least notice of the words which had been addressed to her.

"Stand aside, woman!" cried the young nobleman, in even sterner and more angry tones than before. "Stand aside, I say, or you will have occasion to bitterly rue the consequences!"

"Stand aside yourself!" at length replied Mother Robotham, fiercely, and exhibiting an amazonian disposition, which her appearance fully warranted. "This is my house, not yours!"

"I grant that; but you must allow me to pass."

"There is plenty of room for you!" retorted the woman, significantly, and placing particular stress upon the last word.

The young nobleman pretended not to notice it, and walked on again.

Edgworth Bess trembled so excessively that she could scarcely support her legs under her.

Two steps took them to where the woman was standing.

Another second and they would have passed her, but ere they could do so she suddenly stretched out her hand and grasped Edgworth Bess by her apparel.

A faint shriek came from her lips upon finding this dreadful woman had placed her hand upon her.

With his eyes gleaming with rage, the young nobleman turned upon her.

"Release your hold!" he said.

"I shall not!"

"You will not?"

"I will not!" was the decided answer.

"It is well you are a female, or you would not have dared deny my demands a second time. The respect I have for you, however, is small. Beware, lest you tempt me too far—lest I should forget your sex, and bestow upon you the punishment you deserve!"

During this speech, Mother Robotham remained impassable.

"I shall not release my hold!" she said, with greater firmness even than before. "That which I grasp is my own property, and I will not allow any of it to be taken out of my house!"

"Give me back my own ragged apparel!" said Edgworth Bess, "and you shall have yours, and welcome!"

"Indeed!" said the woman, with a sneer.

"No, no!" exclaimed the young nobleman, "I will not suffer this—it is monstrous! Mother Robotham, we have had dealings before to-day—beware how you provoke me!"

"My lord," said Mother Robotham—for the first time making known the young nobleman's title—"I am in possession of secrets of yours which you would not like to be made public! Beware how you provoke me! I should be sorry to do so; but if you thwart me, I will disclose all!"

"You presume to threaten, then?"

"I do, and I shall carry my threats into execution. That young girl and the clothes she wears belong to me."

"Well, then," said the young nobleman, who was evidently deeply in the power of this infamous woman, or he would not have made the degrading concession he did—"well, then, if such is the case, the matter can be easily arranged between us. I have no desire to quarrel with you."

"Nor I with you, so long as you don't interfere with me."

"Come, then, Mother Robotham, let us consider this matter as settled. You understand? We are friends. This young lady leaves here under my protection. The other particulars we can arrange at some more fitting opportunity."

"As you like, my lord. If such is your determination, I am agreeable; only, I warn you beforehand that the price—"

The young nobleman checked her in what she was about to say by an exclamation of anger and impatience.

"Enough of this!" he cried. "The matter is arranged. Stand aside and let me pass!"

Suddenly and unwillingly, the woman obeyed, but it seemed as though she had complied because she did not know how to refuse.

Edgeworth Bess gave a sigh of relief when she found herself free from the hateful woman's touch.

What had just passed she only partially understood, so greatly was she terrified, and, moreover, much that was hinted at was past her comprehension.

Without further hindrance, they now made their way to the hall door.

A sleepy-looking porter rose from the depths of his easy-chair, and, opening the door, allowed them to pass out.

Oh, how grateful did poor Edgeworth Bess feel when the cold night air played upon her fevered cheeks!

Snow was falling, but very lightly.

It was whirled hither and thither by an eddy wind.

It must have been falling, however, for some time, for the streets, and the trees, and all the buildings were quite covered with it.

All was white.

It was a still night hour, and a strange hush was over the sleeping city, which the snow seemed to produce.

The delightful feeling of coolness rapidly passed away, and Edgeworth Bess shuddered as the wintry blast swept through her scanty clothing, for, though the dress she wore was befitting a lady, yet it was never intended to protect anyone against the inclemency of a winter's night.

Edgeworth Bess shivered, and looked with a feeling of apprehensiveness in the young nobleman's countenance.

He seemed to be suffering deeply from vexation.

CHAPTER CCCXXXI.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN OBTAIN AN UNEXPECTED CLUE TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF EDGORTH BESS.

THE unprincipled tailor, who thought he had done such a good thing for himself by selling the two suits of clothes to two inebriated gentlemen, for the extravagant sum of twenty guineas, was so taken aback by the suddenness with which the events of the last few moments had taken place, that he was unable to offer the least resistance to Blueskin rifling his pockets.

Nor did he dare to speak, and scarcely even to breathe, for fear the pistol should go off, and blow his brains out.

The mortal terror which he suffered during the few moments which Blueskin occupied in emptying his pockets were almost an ample punishment for what he had done.

It was a lesson that lasted him the remainder of his life.

The manner in which Jack had spoken convinced him that his drunkenness was only feigned, though for what purpose he had acted as he had done he had no idea.

The reader may be sure that our old friend did not need to be told twice to empty the tailor's pockets.

He set about the execution of the task with hearty goodwill.

It was not the first time Blueskin had done such a job as that, and the manner in which he cleared his pockets, one after another, evinced what a practised hand he was.

While in the service of Jonathan Wild, he had had plenty of practice in that sort of thing, and he had by no means lost his dexterity through lapse of time.

In less than two moments, every article of value the tailor possessed was transferred to his own pockets.

Not only did he get back the twenty guineas which Jack had so recently paid him, but a large sum which was carefully tied up in a leather bag.

Even the dread of the pistol exploding could not prevent the tailor uttering a dismal groan.

The money that bag contained he had received only that very day.

A customer who had given him no end of trouble to collect his bill had paid him.

He had almost feared he should lose his money, from the length of time the bill had remained due; and now, after the unexpected pleasure of receiving it, he found it go entirely.

Blueskin had no pity upon him, however; and, for our own part, we cannot help thinking he richly deserved the treatment he had received.

The idea of offering him any serious personal injury never once entered their minds.

All they wished to do was to give him a thorough fright, and in this they succeeded completely.

The tailor thought his last moment had surely come.

"I have done," said Blueskin, as he removed the last article from the tailor's pocket.

"Right!" said Jack. Then, turning to the tailor, he added:

"Now, sir, run indoors, and if you are not upstairs before I count three, I will fire after you, and chance the consequences."

"Murder!" exclaimed the tailor, and he made a wild kind of rush into the passage of the house in the direction of the stairs.

Jack Sheppard did not wait to see whether he ascended them or not, but slammed the front door shut in a moment.

"The coast is clear," said Blueskin, who had looked carefully up and down the dark, deserted street. "At length we have baffled our foe."

"We have had a good deal of trouble in doing it," said Jack, cheerfully; "but never mind, old friend, we are free at last."

Just as he spoke, they heard a window somewhere close at hand thrown up with a prodigious clatter, and then a voice, which they recognised as the tailor's, cried:

"Fire! murder! thieves! watch! watch! Oh, murder! thieves! thieves!"

The outcry was tremendous, and an alarm would soon be general.

"We will get away from this place as soon as we can," said Blueskin, "or we may even yet be interrupted."

"True, and though I fancy Jonathan must be some distance off, yet it is quite possible that he is lurking close at hand."

"There is no dependence to be placed upon him; he is generally where he is least expected to be."

"Increase your speed, then, my friend. We will get clear of this locality as quickly as we can."

"It will be best," said Blueskin, as he set off at a trot, which Jack was easily enough able to keep up with.

In a very short time they got a considerable distance from the scene of their last exploit, which had in every respect been a most advantageous one.

They had got clear of their foes at a moment when they were exceedingly hard pressed. They had obtained two suits of clothes which made them a capital disguise; and, into the bargain, they had received a very large sum of money.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that they now experienced a great elation of spirits.

No sooner, however, had the excitement of danger

passed away than the channel of Jack's thoughts was once more directed to Edgworth Bess, from whom they had been so long diverted.

As they reduced their speed to a walk, Jack said :

"Oh, Blueskin, my friend, now that we are safe, tell me what I am to do to recover Edgworth Bess ! Alas—alas ! how bitterly do I repent of having caused her to leave me !"

"Regrets on that score are quite useless, Jack ; and if you will take my advice you will, before you attempt to seek her, or even to decide upon what course of action you shall adopt, turn in somewhere, and get that amount of rest so necessary both to you and me, and indispensable, in fact, to our success."

"I cannot but admit you are right ; and yet, my impatience is so great——"

"I can understand all that ; but do for once be guided by me."

"I will. I had no intention of not doing so. I am sure you must feel the effects of what we have gone through during the last few hours most severely."

"I do—I do. My wound troubles me yet, and though it is now nearly well, it has left a frightful weakness behind it."

"No doubt—no doubt. I can judge of your feelings by my own. I am entirely exhausted !"

"Then let us rest awhile. We have no choice in the matter. Then, when our limbs no longer ache, as they do at present, we will endeavour to hit upon some means of discovering whereabouts the poor girl is."

"When I think of her forlorn and unprotected condition—when I think of the dangers to which she is every hour exposed—my brain whirls round, and I feel as though I was going mad !"

"Then for the present let us drop that topic of conversation, and turn our thoughts to something else. The first and most important point, in my judgment, is the consideration where we are likely to obtain a secure night's shelter."

"Do you know this neighbourhood ?"

"Very slightly."

"Then you could not say where was a safe place ?"

"No, we must chance that. Before we go much further, we shall probably find a coffee-house open ; if so, we shall have no difficulty in procuring a bed."

"I don't know that we can do better."

"Look around you, then ; we cannot possibly go far without meeting with a house of the description mentioned."

As far as they could see, however, all was darkness—from no house within view came forth a single gleam of light.

They kept on, however, and paused before each turning which they passed, and looked narrowly down it.

At length they perceived, some distance down a narrow street that ran at right angles to the principal thoroughfare, a feeble beam of light.

In the hope that this would lead them to what they sought, they proceeded towards it.

They were not disappointed in their expectations.

The beam of light came from the window of a small shop of obscure aspect, the exterior appearance of which, so far as our friends could judge in the darkness, was not very prepossessing.

But they were not in a position to be over particular.

Without hesitation our friends entered.

The shop was empty.

They sat down in one of the boxes near the door, and asked for refreshment, for the pangs of hunger began to make themselves felt now that their excitement had passed away.

They were waited upon by a dirty, untidy girl, whose personal appearance well accorded with the exterior of the house.

A card affixed to one of the walls intimated that there were "good beds" to let, and accordingly our two friends made application, after having despatched the meal that had been placed before them.

They were not very particular, it seemed, about appearances, for the girl agreed immediately upon the stipulation that the money was paid down beforehand.

This, of course, was no obstacle, and they were conducted to a bed-chamber.

Here they slept for several hours, and did not descend until the evening of the next day was close at hand.

They remained in the coffee-room till dusk, judging it would be too dangerous to venture out before.

As soon as the friendly darkness came, they sallied forth.

Both had thoroughly washed themselves, and properly adjusted their new clothing, so that they now presented quite an ordinary appearance, and were not at all calculated to call forth the attention of anyone who passed them in the street.

They now occupied themselves in devising some means of discovering Edgworth Bess.

They could not help thinking, however, that their search was a hopeless one.

They could think of no better plan than that of making their way to the spot where the poor girl had disappeared, and commencing their inquiries at this point, directing them all round, and gradually increasing their range.

More than once they asked themselves whether she had fallen into the hands of Jonathan Wild ; but, after a great deal of consideration upon the subject, they came to the conclusion that she had not.

They supported this view of the case by the demcanour of the thief-taker.

If he had had her in his possession, they were quite of opinion he would have acted rather differently towards them.

They had then no clue whatever to direct them in their search, though they hoped ere long to obtain one.

To reach the spot where he had last seen her was an easy enough matter to Jack Sheppard, for that place was continually before his mental vision.

Upon arriving here, they began in a very methodical manner.

The whole night, however, was consumed without their having been able to obtain the slightest scrap of information to cheer them on to further efforts.

At length day dawned, and then for a time it became necessary for them to relinquish their efforts.

They were compelled to remain out of sight during the daytime.

In this manner—searching by night, and resting and sleeping by day—nearly a week elapsed, and the end of that time saw them no nearer to their object than when they commenced.

This was disheartening to a degree, but still they persevered, convinced that sooner or later they must obtain some information which would turn their exertions in one particular direction.

Still, day after day passing by in this manner with no result decreased their hopes.

What could have become of her ?

That was a question which they asked themselves a thousand times, but always without being able to return any reply.

Without our entering into any minute description, the reader will doubtless be able to form a tolerably good idea of the state of Jack's mind.

It bordered at times upon absolute frenzy.

At length, one evening, about the accustomed hour—that is to say, just as it was growing dusk—they descended from the chamber in which they had passed the night to the coffee-room on the ground floor, where they partook of a meal while waiting for the dusky twilight to deepen into darkness.

They were in the neighbourhood of Westminster.

In the box before them two men were seated.

They were attired in great coats, with a number of capes, such as were worn by coachmen, or the drivers of hackney carriages.

They were talking in rather a loud tone of voice to each other, and sitting so close to them as Jack and Blueskin were, they could not avoid overhearing every word.

At first they listened indifferently, but presently became deeply interested in the conversation which was taking place.

"Of course, Bill," said one, "driving a hackney arn't what it used to be."

"You are right there."

"But still, as I said before, very 'stornary things happens sometimes. Now, I tell you one thing wot's hung on my mind ever since it happened, and I can't get rid of it nohow."

"Was it very 'stornary, then ?"

"Oh, very 'stornary indeed, as you'll say when I tells

you. It's as nigh a week ago as possible—leastways, it ain't no less, and it can't be much more—as I was sitting on the box of my coach, waiting for a fare, and thinking of nothing at all, I prezenly sees at the corner of the street a very 'stornary-looking old 'oman. As soon as she twigged me she hiked her hand, which I understood to mean as how she wanted a coach. So I woke the old hosses up, and rolled up to where she stood. I was jest pulling up to the kerb, close to which she was, when sez she, 'Don't stop here, but foller me round the corner.' 'All right, mum,' sez I, and I faked the horses up again, and turned round the corner into a quiet street; and now comes the 'stornary part of the bizness!'

CHAPTER CCCXXXII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ARRIVE AT THE HOUSE IN SPRING GARDENS.

THE hackney-coachman paused to take another draught of coffee, for talking dried his mouth, and Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, with a strong feeling of interest, leaned forward on their hands and listened with increased intentness.

The coachman's companion, too, seemed greatly interested by this narrative, and he waited impatiently for his comrade to resume.

"Now, Bill, as I said afore, this here's the 'stornary part of the bizness. I follers this rumny old 'oman round the corner. She only goes a yard or two, and then stops before a house. In course I pulled up, and then I saw, a-sitting on a door-step, one of the prettiest little girls as ever I saw in my life. Sez I to myself, 'Summat's in the wind, Joe; keep your blessed eyes open.' 'Don't be afraid!' sez myself to I. Well, this here old 'oman, whose dress had as many bright colours in it as a drop of oil a-floating on the top of a puddle of water—this Eere old 'oman goes up to the door-step, and stops before this here little gal—leastways, she wasn't so very little, but she wasn't nowhere near as big as our Bet. Howsomever, that's neither here nor there, and nas nothing to do with the 'stornary bizness.'"

"Cut along then, Joe—let's hear it!"

"Don't be impatient. Well, this pretty young gal as I was a-telling you about, wot was a-sitting down upon the door-step, wasn't dressed noways according to her beauty. Her clothes was very ragged. I don't know whether I told you before, but she seemed to be in a kind of a faint or a swoond, or summat of that sort, for the old 'oman opened her "ridicule" and takes out a little bottle. Then she pulls the stopper out, and holds it just under the gal's nose, who opens her eyes and looks about her as though she didn't know where she was. Well, atween us, we got the gal into the coach; but as soon as she sat down on the seat she seemed to go off into a swoond again. Howsomever, I didn't say nothing, but shuts the door. 'Spring Gardens!' sez the old 'oman. Now, what do you think of that, Bill? Blest if I couldn't have chucked a stone on to the very place!"

"Go on, Joe!"

"I'm a-going! Well, in course I was obliged to drive where she directed, but I smelt something 'stornary; so I thought I should have a downright good fare. So, when I got to Spring Gardens, I jumps off the box, opens the door, and helps them out. Well, this here gal had fainted again; so I picked her up, and carried her up the steps to the front door of the house, where they took her off me. Well, when I had done this, how much do you think the old 'oman gave me? You'll never guess, so I'll tell you. It was five bob!"

"That's just what I expected."

"Well, I tell you, I expected a good deal more, but I didn't get it. I grumbled, and cussed, and swore, but that didn't do no good, and in the end I was obliged to give in and be off. When I drove away from that there house, I thought to myself, 'Now, there's something 'stornary in all this, only I can't just make it out. I wonder who that gal was?—such a pretty gal as that belongs to somebody, I know, and I wonder what that old 'oman wants to take her to that house for?—no good, that's clear.' Well, do you know, Bill, this here gal stuck in my mind, and I couldn't get rid of her nohow, so I thought I would make some inquiries about this fine-looking house in Spring

Gardens, and at last I found out all about it. Now, what do you think that house was?"

"I don't know, Joe."

"Lean over the table, and I'll whisper it in your ear."

Something was then said in a low tone of voice, but what it was, Jack and Blueskin could not tell, though they strained their ears to the utmost.

Whatever it was, seemed to surprise the man who had been called Bill by his companion.

Our friends, however, determined to know more, and that at once.

Just as they came to this conclusion, the two men left the coffee-shop.

Jack and Blueskin rose too, immediately, and followed them out.

The one who had told the 'stornary narrative, as he called it, was removing the nose-bags from his horses' heads, for his coach was waiting outside the door.

His companion was similarly engaged.

Our friends hailed the former, and, with a bow, he came towards them.

Blueskin addressed him:

"I want to have a few words with you, my friend, and I think it is very likely I shall be able to put you in the way of earning a guinea."

The man's eyes sparkled, and he became all attention in a moment.

"I heard you telling your companion about a circumstance that happened to you a short time ago."

"Yes, sir; and a very 'stornary circumstance it were, too!"

"So I think, and I feel much interested in it. Look—here is the guinea!" and, as he spoke, Blueskin drew the coin mentioned from his pocket, and held it up to the inspection of the hackney-coachman.

"You shall have this," he continued, "if you will tell me the number of the house in Spring Gardens, and what it was you found out about it."

"Tip us the quid, your honour! The number was 57."

"57?"

"Yes."

"And the house?"

"Why, the house is what they call a house of accommodation for West-end swells. Do you twig my flower of langwidge?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jack. "Can it be possible? My worst fears are more than confirmed!"

The hackney-coachman looked rather surprised at this speech, and he said:

"Well, this is 'stornary! If I don't believe you belong to that gal!"

"We do, we do—I am sure we do!"

The coachman gave a long whistle.

"Then I am sorry for you, for that there house is one of the awfulest dens in all London!"

"Stay, stay! Describe this young girl you have mentioned!"

The coachman did so, and then no doubt remained in their minds that it was Edgworth Bess of whom he spoke. Jack's despair was terrible.

In his darkest moments he had never anticipated anything so bad as this.

"Well, blest if I didn't think something more would come of this affair!" ejaculated the cabman; "and I am very glad being as how you have found me out, 'cause I'll do the best for you I can!"

"Drive us to this house—drive us there at once, and I will level it to the ground if they have injured one hair of her head!"

"Now, my young friend, don't you be violent and hasty. You had much better listen to what I have to say."

"Speak!" said Blueskin, who was much calmer than his companion; "speak! No doubt you can give us important information and advice. If you do so, you may rely upon being well recompensed."

"Thank you, sir. I take it you belongs to this here pretty young gal?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And in course you are much put about to think she has got into such hands as those of Mother Robotham?"

"Who?"

"Didn't I tell you?"

"No!"



EDGORTH BESS TAKES A FRANTIC LEAP INTO THE RIVER.

"Well, then, Mother Robotham's the name of the old 'oman I have been talking about."

"Go on—I understand."

"I say you would be glad enough to get her out of such hands, of coorse, but you must be very careful, or you will never do it. You must use no violence; if you do, you will never succeed. You must take 'em all by surprise."

"I understand."

"You must get into the house and get her out of it without the blessed old 'oman being aware of what you are arter. If you talk of levelling the house to the ground, you'll do no good at all."

"You shall be well paid for this!"

"All right, yer honour! Of coorse, my time is my money."

"To be sure; and I think you will find your time was never of such value to you before."

The coachman's eyes sparkled with pleasure

"Then you take my advice?"

"Certainly!"

No. 67.

"I know the young gal's there, and you will get into the house on the sly——"

"Just so; you leave that part of the business to me."

"All right, sir, only I should just like to know that we understand each other. You will then try to bring this young girl away without kicking up a rumpus."

"That is our intention, though it would not be a trifle that would keep us back."

"Well, then," said the coachman, "I'll tell you what had better be done."

"What?"

"In the first place, if you will get into the coach, I will drive you to Spring Gardens. It won't take two minutes."

"Agreed."

"Well, when we are there, I will show you the house, and leave you to get into it. In the meantime, I'll wait about with the coach, and when you come out, I shall be ready waiting. You can put her inside the coach, get in

yourselves, and off we should be before they knew where they were."

"That arrangement suits me very well," said Blueskin. "I should think this is not the first job of the sort you have had to do with."

"Well, that's neither here nor there, you know. I might and I might not; but if a hackney-coachman was to tell all his history, it would be as strange a one as ever was listened to."

"No doubt—no doubt! But we are ready now. We will get in."

"All right, and you will find yourself at Spring Gardens before you know where you are."

"The sooner the better."

As they spoke, Jack and Blueskin got into the hackney coach.

The driver ascended the box, and the cumbrous but comfortable vehicle was set in motion.

Jack was so overcome by the disastrous intelligence they had so unexpectedly received, that up to the present moment he had felt himself unable to command his voice sufficiently to speak.

Now, however, he endeavoured to address his faithful comrade.

"Oh, Blueskin!" he exclaimed, "this news is of a far more dreadful character than I anticipated! I shudder, and my blood runs cold in my veins, when I think of what may have happened."

"Do not distress yourself too much. Things may not be so bad as they appear; though, goodness knows, what we have heard is bad enough!"

"Oh, it is horrible! Never—never did I think of her being menaced with such a fate! Better—oh, better would it have been had she fallen into the hands of the thief-taker himself!"

"Come, come—calm yourself! If you do not, we shall stand but a poor chance of success. Control your emotions, I pray you; in a minute or two more we shall reach the house."

Jack shuddered, but was silent.

"This man," continued Blueskin, "whom I consider it very lucky we have met with, has mapped out a capital plan of proceeding, and I cannot myself see how it could be improved. He does not know, though, what an easy thing it would be for us to enter a house. That part of the business will be attended with very little difficulty, I fancy."

"We can do that; but when we find her——"

"Let us hope for the best," said Blueskin; "it can do no harm, and things may turn out much better than we have dared to anticipate."

"I can see no room for hope."

"Come, come—do not be so cast down! It may be—and I fervently hope that such may prove the case—that we may be fortunate enough to arrive at a moment when she has most need of our presence. Who can tell? Once more, Jack, let me advise you to hope for the best."

"I will try to do so," said Jack, who was somewhat encouraged and reassured by the view which his companion took of the case.

In the meantime, the coach rumbled on, until at length it pulled up with a jerk.

Before they could open the door, the driver had descended from his box, and stood at the door.

"I haven't driven up to the door of the house," he said, "because I don't want to excite suspicion; but if you will get down here, I will show you the house where the old woman took the young gal."

Our friends were well pleased to observe this fresh instance of the driver's acuteness, and they alighted in a moment.

"I will just slip the nose-bags on the horses—I sha'n't be a minute—and then, when I have done that, I shall be able to leave them—they won't move while they are eating."

To this they consented, and it was accordingly done.

The coachman then walked a little distance, and crossed over the road, being all the time closely followed by Blueskin and Jack, who were anxious in the extreme to see this house.

He paused close to the railings in front of a mansion, the appearance of which was in every respect first-class.

It would not have disgraced any gentleman to have taken up his residence in such an abode.

Our two friends were much surprised at the magnificence of it, and they almost felt inclined to doubt the truth of what the coachman had told them.

"Are you sure," said Blueskin, "that it was to this mansion that you drove the woman you have described?"

"I am quite certain of it. I told you the number was 57. Step this way, and I will show it to you on the door; there is a lamp which will enable you to see it."

As he spoke, the coachman crept on until he was on a level with the front door.

There was a lamp over it, and this cast a tolerably bright light around.

By the aid of this, and assisted a little by their imagination, since they had been told what figures were on the door, they perceived the number.

It was 57.

CHAPTER CCCCXXXIII.

EDGORTH BESS INDIGNANTLY REJECTS THE YOUNG NOBLEMAN'S INSIDIOUS PROPOSAL.

EDGORTH BESS, although, as we have said, she did not comprehend the scene which had just taken place between the young nobleman and that singular specimen of feminine humanity, Mother Robotham, still could not but be aware that the vexation so palpably visible, not only in the looks, but also in the whole demeanour of him who stood by her side, proceeded solely from what had taken place between them.

There was much in what had passed which Edgworth Bess would at no time have understood; but, labouring under such excitement and terror as she was, it was nearly all incomprehensible to her.

She was clearly conscious of but one fact only, and that was, that she was free from the precincts of that dreadful house, the recollection of which would to her be always a thing of horror.

She was free.

She had escaped those frightful dangers with which she had been menaced; she was safe from the clutches of that hideous female, Mother Robotham.

Can we be surprised, then, that her heart overflowed with gratitude to her young preserver for all that he had done on her behalf?

She felt annoyed to think she had been the cause of the vexation which now filled his mind.

Timidly, then, and with a slight shiver as the keen wintry blast swept past her, she looked up into his countenance.

That this young nobleman had committed himself in some way or other, and was in the power of Mother Robotham, the reader need scarcely be told.

He will have surmised as much, as well as the nature of the secret which gave her power over him.

It was not, perhaps, the knowledge of this unpleasant fact which produced the effect described, so much as the mortification he could not help experiencing at the thought that the exposure should have been made in the presence of the young girl who had so confidently placed herself under his protection, and in whose eyes he doubtless wished to appear to as much advantage as possible.

This was the reflection which pressed heavily upon his mind when Edgworth Bess gave that furtive glance into his countenance, and noted its expression.

The young nobleman observed this glance, and his mortified feeling increased.

He was conscious that he appeared in a despicable light, and that his presence in that house, and the woman's demeanour towards him, redounded little to his credit.

A strange thrill shot through his heart when the poor girl glanced up at him.

She had made a deep impression upon a heart whose greatest fault was a too keen susceptibility of female loveliness.

The form and features of Edgworth Bess could only dimly be discerned in the darkness of the street, but the light which came from the oil lamp over the door, and the reflection which seemed to come from the white surface of the snow upon the ground, revealed sufficient of both to recall forcibly to his mind the appearance which she presented when in the brilliantly-lighted chamber in which their strange interview had taken place.

And that he should have been thus impressed with the

personal appearance of our fair heroine is not to be surprised at.

Never in her life had her charms been exhibited to such advantage.

Her costume was magnificent and rich in the extreme, and the varying emotions which swayed her mind during the whole of the conversation imparted to her cheeks a lovely crimson glow, and to her eyes a brilliancy which made the diamonds the young nobleman wore about his person appear dull.

To him she seemed the loveliest being in the form of woman he had ever in his life beheld.

It was the deference which her beauty exacted that prompted him to treat her as he had done since their explanation, but it was the desire of obtaining this lovely creature for himself which made him so solicitous to remove her from that house.

And thus we see that, generous and noble as his conduct appeared, he was in reality actuated by a selfish and ignoble feeling.

In a low voice he addressed her.

"At last," he said, "we are free from that house, and you can go now in whatever direction you may think proper."

"Oh, my lord," exclaimed Edgworth Bess, in tones of fervent gratitude—"for such I hear is your title—how can I utter thanks sufficient to repay you for the inestimable service you have rendered me? I shudder and turn pale when I think of the frightful peril from which you have snatched me, and feel altogether incompetent of expressing my gratitude."

"Say no more—say no more upon that point, I beg. What I have done, I have done willingly enough, and I take shame to myself for having behaved towards you as I did."

"That was because we were both deceived," said Edgworth Bess. "Fain would I erase from my mind all recollection of the unpleasant topic."

"Generous girl, I can see you are willing to extenuate my unworthy conduct! But I will listen to no such extenuation. I say again, I take shame to myself for having acted towards you as I have, and all that I have since done I hope you will look upon as some kind of reparation."

"If it pleases you, my lord, I am willing to look upon it in that light; but I can never forget the service you have done me!"

"It gives me pleasure to listen to your thanks, although I am convinced that I do not deserve them. I see, now, the ground is covered with snow, and a keen wind whistles through the street. It was thoughtless of me to remain speaking to you here. Tell me, to what place of shelter can I conduct you?"

These words pierced the heart of poor Edgworth Bess.

She knew not what to say.

Upon the spur of the moment she was unable to name any place of refuge and security to which she could be escorted.

In a voice of extreme agitation, she replied:

"Nay, nay, my lord! I cannot suffer you to trouble yourself any more about a poor girl like myself. Already I feel under the weight of too much obligation to you, and cannot consent that the load should be increased."

"Do not, I pray you, look upon what I have done in such a light as that. Besides, you must be aware that at night the streets of London are scarcely safe for anyone to walk in, and least of all for a young girl like yourself. I must, therefore, insist upon not quitting you until I have succeeded in restoring you to your friends. It is my duty to see you to some place of safety."

The young nobleman proceeded thus far in his speech because the agitation of Edgworth Bess was so extreme that she was unable to command her voice so as to interrupt him.

"Let me entreat you," she at length exclaimed—"let me entreat you, by what you have already done, not to press this point upon me. Leave me here, I beseech you. I am not afraid of encountering danger in the streets."

"With any other request uttered by you, I should most certainly comply, because I should not be able to deny you anything; but in the present instance I must be firm. I cannot allow you to rush blindly into this fresh peril."

"Oh, my lord, you distress me—indeed you do!"

"Distress you?"

"Yes—yes!"

"I do not understand."

"Do not—pray do not press me for an explanation!"

Calm yourself, my dear girl—calm yourself! There is no necessity for this agitation."

"You know not, nor would I have you know for worlds!"

"You speak in riddles."

"No matter. Let us part here."

"Never!"

"My lord, I renew my request. Let us part here."

"I cannot consent to it."

"You must—you must! Farewell, my lord! For all that you have done, believe me I am most deeply grateful, and should I live a hundred years, I shall never forget you or the peril which I have luckily escaped through your intervention. Farewell, my lord! Say farewell to me, and we will part, for that we shall ever meet again is scarcely probable."

"Nay, nay, I will never consent to such a separation!" and as he spoke the young nobleman grasped the poor girl's hand so tightly that she was unable to extricate it. "It is impossible that we can part like this. I cannot consent to it. For your own good, I implore you to tell me to what place I can escort you. Where is your home?"

"My home!" mournfully ejaculated Edgworth Bess.

Her companion did not seem to understand what the tone of her voice implied, for he continued:

"Fear not to tell me," he said. "I pledge you my word of honour as a gentleman that I will take you in safety to your own door."

"I do not doubt you," said Edgworth Bess, her voice half suffocated with tears. "There was no need for you to have given me your last assurance."

"Nevertheless, I repeat it."

"There is no need to do so."

"Once more let me entreat you to tell me, where is your home?"

"It is impossible."

"Impossible?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand you."

"I say, my lord, it is impossible, and do not press me further."

"I see it all now. You are agitated and excited, and scarcely conscious of what you are saying."

"Not so, my lord."

"You are much agitated."

"I admit that."

"Then calm yourself."

"I shall be calm the moment you cease to press me upon this topic. It is from this cause alone that my agitation proceeds."

"You bewilder me. I know not what to think. Can it be possible—"

"What, my lord?"

"Pardon me if I offend you by speaking my thoughts, but—"

"What?"

"From what you have said, and the manner you have spoken, I am driven to the conclusion that you have no home."

A gasping sob from the young girl's breast was his reply.

"Ah!" he cried; "I see now that I have pained, and perhaps offended you."

"No—no!—believe me, you have not. It is best, however, that you should know the truth. You are right; in your conjecture—I have no home."

"No home? Good heavens! What am I to think? What is your future purpose? Whither was it that you intended to go?"

"I know not."

"Know not?" he repeated, in accents of surprise. "Oh, listen to me—hear what I have to say!"

"I am compelled to listen, my lord."

"These words are intended as a reproach. It is true that by retaining your hand in my grasp I keep you here against your will, but I do so for your own good. Listen, then! Discard from your thoughts all idea of leaving me. Believe me, I both can and will provide you with a home, and such a one as you might feel proud to have. I have rank and I have wealth—I am uncontrolled in my actions

—I am in no way fettered. Ponder, then, upon my proposal—”

“Enough—enough, my lord! For the sake of the good opinion which I have formed of you, let us part here—now, at once—and say no more! Our paths lie in opposite directions!”

“Not so, by heavens!—not so!” exclaimed the young man, vehemently. “Abandon from this moment the rash resolution which you have formed. I am convinced it is impossible that you have reflected upon the consequences of such a step.”

“There needs no reflection.”

“Indeed there does—serious, grave reflection—and there it is that you fall into a mistake. You know not—dream not of the danger which will assail you. That from which you have so providentially escaped will sink into insignificance by comparison. Peril will await you at every step you take!”

“No matter—I am resolved!”

“Do not be so hasty, but hear me out. Would it not be much wiser upon your part to comply with the proposition I was about to make when you interrupted me?”

“My lord——”

“Nay, let me speak!”

“Do you wish to forfeit my good opinion, and undo all the good you have achieved?”

“I am not afraid of that. Once more I ask you to listen to me. You have no home—you have confessed that. From this it is only fair to infer that you have no relatives. You are, then, alone in the world. To a young girl, what position in life could be more forlorn and wretched? None, and nothing but misery will await you. That is one side of the case; and now attend to the other. I have had the good fortune to do you a service—to occupy, indeed, the enviable situation of your protector. I have freed you from one danger—I am willing to stand between you and all others. I desire to place you where peril will no longer have the power to reach you. You have no home—I will provide you with one. You have no relatives—I will supply their place. With your kind consent, I will be as in all to you! That is my proposal. I will not press you for any reply to it now. I am willing to allow you as much time as you think proper to reflect upon the matter, and weigh it carefully in your mind. For the present, however, I must insist upon placing you in some place of security. To leave you here in the street a prey to all kinds of disaster and without the least chance of seeing you again is impossible! Come, then! Let me place you in safety. Your decision I will ask you for at some future opportunity, when you are less agitated than you are at present. Come!”

As he spoke, he attempted to lead the young girl along the street, but she resolutely refused to stir.

The long speech which we have set down was uttered with extreme rapidity, and with such impetuosity that, though Edgworth Bess strove to interrupt him twice or thrice, she failed to do so. He continued, heedless of what she said, and some strange kind of fascination seemed to compel her to listen to all he said.

When he ceased the charm was broken, and the attempt he made to lead her forward roused her into action.

“Release me, my lord!” she cried in tones of great decision. “Release me! Two persons so widely different as we are, I am convinced, have nothing in common with honour to myself. Your proposal I reject! Once more I thank you for what you have done! Once more I demand to be released! Farewell!”

As she uttered this last word, Edgworth Bess succeeded by a sudden movement in disengaging her hand.

No sooner did she feel herself at liberty, than she darted off with the speed of the wind, and in a moment was lost to view.

CHAPTER CCCXXXIV.

EDGWORTH BESS ONCE MORE FINDS HERSELF FRIENDLESS, ALONE, AND UNPROTECTED, IN THE STREETS OF LONDON.

FRANTICALLY did the young nobleman call after Edgworth Bess, and implore her to return.

She heeded not his cries.

Intent only upon escaping from them, she flitted over the snow-covered ground like a spirit.

He lost no time in commencing a pursuit, but he soon abandoned it.

The young girl once lost to view, he knew full well that it would be madness to attempt to overtake her.

Breathlessly did Edgworth Bess continue on her course. She did not stop to listen—she did not pause to look behind her.

She felt convinced that she was pursued, and this conviction gave her strength to run with great rapidity.

But at length exhausted breath and failing limbs compelled her to stop.

Fearfully and tremblingly she came to a halt, and looked about her.

All was still.

No human being was in sight.

No sound broke upon the deathlike stillness.

Entirely overcome, she sat down upon the snow, nor did she rise until several minutes had passed away.

Innocent as she was, and favourably disposed as she was towards the young nobleman, yet she could not close her eyes to the true meaning of the proposition he had made to her.

Pained and grieved at this instance of baseness in one who she thought to find all honour, she had felt herself suddenly endowed with strength sufficient to enable her to release herself from his detaining grasp.

How thankful she felt when at length she rose from the spot where she had fallen!

She had been preserved from two terrible dangers that night, and she shuddered as she wondered to what new peril she should now be exposed.

Desirous, however, of placing as great a distance as possible, not only between herself and the young nobleman, but also between herself and that ill-omened house in Spring Gardens, she hurried onward.

Growing now somewhat calmer, and less apprehensive that someone was following her, she slackened her speed soon afterwards, and looked about her.

As before, her eyes and ears convinced her that no one was pursuing her.

She then glanced up at the houses, but did not recognise them.

Keeping on steadily, she soon saw before her the dim outlines of a large building, which, after gazing at it for a little while, she found was Westminster Abbey.

This gave her a clue to her whereabouts.

Turning to the left, she proceeded over Westminster Bridge.

Not the present elegant structure, but the one which preceded it.

One remarkable and often-described feature in this bridge was that on either side, at certain distances, were recesses of a semi-dome-like shape, and fitted with seats.

Edgworth Bess passed by the first of these; but upon coming to the second, she resolved to seat herself on it, and rest awhile, for she was terribly fatigued.

Accordingly she did so.

But she felt the cold most acutely.

Not only was it a most inclement night, but her clothes were scanty, and a chill water-wind blew off the river.

She shivered like one in an ague fit.

How long she sat there she knew not.

Occasionally persons passed like spectres over the bridge, as the snow was now sufficiently deep to deaden the sound of footsteps.

At length that gloomy winter's night passed away.

Day broke.

The bridge now became every moment more and more thronged with people.

Now that daylight was fast approaching, Edgworth Bess left her resting-place.

Her limbs were cramped and stiff with sitting in the cold, but still she did not feel quite so much fatigued.

With a somewhat lighter heart, and with a brisker tread, she continued her way over the bridge.

She soon discovered, however, that her appearance attracted universal attention; and that it should do so was a fact scarcely to be wondered at.

To see a female, attired as she was, walking the streets only an hour or so after daybreak was a spectacle which the inhabitants of Westminster had never before beheld.

Taking little apparent notice of this, Edgworth Bess continued on her way, terribly puzzled and perplexed as to what would be the best thing for her to do.

She by no means wished to attract such universal attention as she did.

On the contrary, she would fain have crept along the streets without being noticed by a single human being.

That it was the extraordinary style of her dress that excited curiosity, and directed all eyes towards her, she felt certain; but she did not know how to get rid of it.

She had no money—not so much as the smallest coin.

How, then, she asked herself, could she possibly purchase a change of apparel?

This was a question she could not solve.

She was forced to continue onwards as she was.

At length, on passing down a street she saw a shop, the shutters of which had been taken down, and a boy was busily occupied in hanging up various articles of second-hand apparel.

She hesitated as she passed this shop, and after going a few steps farther came to a halt.

After a moment's deliberation, she resolved to turn back, and try whether she could procure what she wanted at this shop.

She felt timid and frightened, but really there was no occasion for it.

She paused again before the shop, and at last, with an effort of desperation, followed the boy in on one of the occasions when he entered for a fresh supply of clothes to hang up.

Owing to the window and door being covered with garments, the interior of this shop was very dark indeed; but still Bess was able to see a woman who was standing behind the counter.

With that peculiar accent and pronunciation which denote the children of Israel, this woman inquired her business.

She spoke respectfully, for this Jew woman's eyes were used to the gloomy obscurity of the shop, and she could see that the clothing worn by her early customer was such as befitted a duchess.

It was some time before Edgworth Bess could make known her wishes; but at length, in a faint and tremulous voice, she said:

"I want a change of dress!"

She would have said more, but was unable to command her voice to steadiness.

"All right, my tear," said the woman; "you have come to the right shop and no mistake! Whash is it you would like to have?"

"I have no money!" said Edgworth Bess.

"No monish, eh?" said the woman, with a decided change in her voice and manner; "but perhaps," she added, brightening up at the fresh idea and renewed hope of doing business, "perhaps you have got monish worth?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Edgworth Bess, eagerly.

"Well, whash have you got to offer in exchange?"

"There is this dress," said the poor girl; "look, it is a costly one, and made of the best materials. I want you to give me a common one in the place of it, and a bonnet for my head!"

"Oh, my tear, you ask too much—sadly too much! I could not do it—s'help me Joshua, I could not do it!"

"Alas, alas!" moaned Edgworth Bess. "That hope is gone! What am I to do now?"

As she uttered these words in a low and mournful voice, she turned round and was about to leave the shop.

Hastily, however, the woman called her back.

She was by no means desirous of losing so good a customer.

"Shtop!" she said. "Shtop, my dear! and I will try what can be done."

Revived by this faint hope, Edgworth Bess turned round.

"Whash sort of a bonnet and dress did you require?"

"Any kind—no matter what; the commoner the better."

"I will try what I can do, my tear, just for the look of you, though I am shure to lose by this bit of bizness."

The Jew woman took down from a peg a common and tattered sort of dress.

She had bought it the night before for fourpence.

From a drawer she produced a hat such as was generally worn by females at that period.

This was irretrievably damaged.

"I've got these two, my tear, but I want two shillings

and the dress you have on before I can part with them. I do, s'help me Joshua!"

"Alas, then, I must remain as I am, for, as I told you, I have no money!"

"Well, here, take 'em—take 'em! It's my failing to be generous. I shall lose awfully by this; but it's all for your sake, my tear! Step inside a minute, and then you can change your dress."

Edgworth Bess was only too glad to comply with this request, and she changed her dress accordingly, leaving the beautiful dress she had worn in exchange for the miserable rags the Jew woman gave her.

Edgworth Bess, however, was well enough pleased with her bargain; but reflecting that a shawl or cloak of some kind would be requisite not only for appearance's sake but for protection from the cold as well, she, after a great deal of trouble, succeeded in getting a cloak—which was, however, only fit to be worn by a mendicant.

Highly pleased with her bargain, she left the shop, and once more continued her way along the street.

These wants having been supplied, the pangs of hunger began to gnaw at her heart, and she anxiously asked herself how she was to succeed in obtaining food.

No sooner was she out of one difficulty than another stared her in the face.

She was pleased to find that she no longer formed such an attractive object as she had done a short time before.

A glance of compassion was now all that was bestowed upon her.

As she wandered on she became plunged in profound thought.

What was she to do? was the question that stared her in the face.

She did not know.

Sick and faint with fatigue, cold, and want of food, her spirits suffered great depression.

She began to lose all hopes of ever again being united to Jack Sheppard.

Certainly, it seemed as though she would perish of cold and want before the meeting took place.

Eventually, she thought, she must discover him—but when?

For aught she knew, Jack Sheppard might by this time have received his death-blow from the thief-taker; and, if so, what was to become of her?

She must act for herself.

London was a place where money could be procured, and in many different ways.

It was necessary that she should have money; but how was she to earn it?

Not long did this question perplex her.

She recollected she had a trade in her fingers, and wondered how she had forgotten it till now.

By it she could at least earn sufficient to save her from utter destitution.

It was a horrid, soul-depressing, and body-wearing trade.

The reader will, doubtless, recollect that when Edgworth Bess was first introduced on the stage of this narrative, it was as a shroud-maker.

That was the trade at which she thought she could obtain a livelihood.

She had worked for Mrs. Roblet for a length of time—until, indeed, the woman who she always thought was her mother died, and then she was suddenly deprived of her employment.

It was on the night when this took place that Jack had the good fortune to rescue her from the attack which Lord Donnull and his man Steggs made upon her.

From that hour she had had no employment.

Now, however, thrown so entirely upon her own resources as she was, she determined to look about her until she found a place where she could obtain work of this description to do.

Having now a purpose in view, she forgot to a great extent her fatigue and the hunger that was gnawing at her breast.

With renewed hope and cheerfulness, she looked into shop window after shop window, hoping to find one of the particular description she sought.

In this she was for a long time unsuccessful.

She travelled a great distance before she came to where these articles were made.

Entering, she requested employment; but the man in

the shop, glancing suspiciously at her habiliments, sternly bade her begone.

Downcast and trembling, the poor girl left the shop.

As soon as she got outside, she wept long and bitterly.

Many saw her, but none inquired the cause of her grief, or attempted in any way to assuage it.

At length, from sheer exhaustion, she ceased weeping, and, looking up, found she had paused opposite another shroud-maker's.

Such an effect had her former rebuff had upon her, that her heart sunk at the bare idea of entering this shop and making another attempt.

Still some kind of fascination kept her hovering about the spot.

At length she walked up to the window, and looked at the ghastly and ominous articles exposed in it.

Upon her, however, they produced but a slight effect, for she was familiar with them.

At length she caught sight of a card.

It was a small one, and upon it were scrawled, in scarcely legible letters, two words.

Yet they were expressive—to the poor girl who deciphered them especially so.

The two words were, "HANDS WANTED."

Although she saw this announcement, and understood it so well, yet the poor girl was afraid to enter.

She could not forget the manner in which she had been treated such a little time ago.

Her spirits were by far too delicate and sensitive to bear up against such rude rebuffs, or even an unkind word.

And so, shivering with cold and hunger, she stood hesitatingly before the window.

Alas, how sad it was to see her in such a situation and in such a frame of mind!

She was unable to tear herself away from the window, and she felt it to be equally out of her power to summon up the courage to enter.

Yet she strove very hard to do so.

She reasoned with herself upon the subject, but without being able to do as she desired.

The dread of the reception she might receive was too vividly before her.

At length, a sharp pang of hunger accomplished what she had been in vain trying to bring herself to do.

She entered.

It was a desperate chance.

She might obtain work, and she might not.

She tried hard, however, to console herself with the reflection that, if she failed, she could not meet with worse treatment than she had received at the place where she first made application.

CHAPTER CCCXXV.

EDGORTH BESS AT LENGTH SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING THE EMPLOYMENT SHE SO WISHED FOR.

EDGORTH BESS entered the shroud-maker's shop.

The first thing she noticed was that a number of men were at work in it.

Shrinking and terrified, she crept towards the counter.

She hardly dared to raise her eyes.

She was startled by a sharp voice asking what she wanted.

Looking up as these words fell upon her ears, she saw that they were uttered by a thin, waspish-looking woman, who was standing behind a counter, busily engaged in folding up some articles.

For the life of her, Edgorth Bess could not reply to the query so roughly and sharply put.

She drew in her breath, and opened her lips, but she was unable to articulate a sound.

The question was repeated, and this time in tones of even greater asperity than before.

The poor girl's confusion increased.

"What do you want?" asked the woman; and then, jumping to a conclusion caused by the appearance which our heroine presented, she added, with very particular emphasis:

"We never give nobody nothink!"

"I do not want you to give me anything," faltered Edgorth Bess.

"Oh! Well, p'raps you'll tell me your business!"

"I saw a card——"

"Oh, you have come after work, have you?"

Edgorth Bess inclined her head.

"Then, why did you not say so at once? I have got no time to waste upon you. But then, it's just like you poor people. You are every one of you bone idle!"

"I am willing to work," said Edgorth Bess, who was spurred on by the increasing pangs of hunger to make a desperate effort. "Give me work to do, and I will do it! I am starving."

"Well, what if you are?" was the unfeeling rejoinder, "do you think I have got time to listen to all my work-people's troubles?"

"I do not want you to listen to mine," said Edgorth Bess, meekly. "All I desire is employment."

"Are you used to the shroud-making work?"

"Yes, I have worked at it for years."

"And is that your manners?"

Edgorth Bess looked at the speaker in surprise.

She could not at first see the connection between this question and what she had last said.

"It's just like you workpeople, however," continued the shopkeeper; "you none of you never has no more manners nor a pig."

The reader will perceive that this woman was very prodigal of her negatives.

She might, perhaps, have fallen into the mistake of supposing that they gave additional force to what she said.

"I am at a loss to think of what breach of good manners I have been guilty."

The woman held up her hands in amazement.

"Oh, save and deliver me!" she exclaimed. "Well, if ever I heard anything to come up to that!"

Then, slightly changing the tone of her voice, she added:

"Well, since you are so ignorant of what good manners is, I would just tell you that when workpeople say anything to me, they always, in a manner of speaking, say 'Mem!'"

"I understand you," said Edgorth Bess, "and will not offend again. I tell you once more, I am starving. I am quick at the trade, as you will soon find if you will give me employment."

"Well, perhaps you may be; but you must know that shrouds is cheaper now than ever they was, and we have been obliged to reduce the wages according."

"I am willing to work for a small sum. I am, indeed, ready to do anything to save me from starvation."

"Well, that's your business, and not mine."

"I am aware of that, ma'am."

"Oh, you can speak as you ought to when you like, I hear!"

"I shall try to give you satisfaction in every way possible," replied Edgorth Bess.

"Well, that's all right."

"Shall you be able to give me anything to do, ma'am?"

"I don't know."

Edgorth Bess gave a sigh of disappointment.

"You don't look strong enough for our work—you are sadly too delicate."

"I am used to the work," said Edgorth Bess, imploringly.

"Very likely, young woman—very likely; but, you see, what with the competition we have to fight against, and what with the awful price of material, we are not only obliged to reduce the wages, as I told you before, but have everybody at work longish hours. I work longish hours myself."

"I am willing, ma'am," replied the poor girl, "to submit to the rules of your establishment, whatever they may be."

"Oh, very good! Now, that's about the most sensible thing I have heard a workwoman say for a long time. They are always talking some nonsense or other about being hungry, or having to work too many hours, or not feeling well, or some ridiculous thing or other. Why, nothing of that sort never ails me."

"Can you employ me, then?"

"I will take you on trial, and see what you can do."

"Thank you, ma'am—thank you! I don't know what to say—you have snatched me from death—death!"

And the unfortunate heiress burst into tears.

"Now, no snivelling!" cried the shopkeeper. "If you want to please me, you'll stop that sort of thing. I can't abide snivelling."

Edgworth Bess dried her tears and stifled her sobs as well as she was able.

"As I said before, I don't mind taking you on trial for a few days. The wages is——"

The woman hesitated.

Edgworth Bess watched her eagerly, anxious to know the price of her toilsome labour.

"The wages is," continued the shopkeeper, "three shillings a week, and you will have to find your own needles and thread."

The poor girl looked at this vampire despairingly.

Small as had been the sum she earned with unintermitting toil while working for Mrs. Roblet, it amounted to nearly double the sum just mentioned.

But she was starving, and she felt that she did not dare refuse to accede to the infamous terms proposed.

In a faint, desponding voice, she answered:

"Very well, ma'am."

The shopkeeper screwed up her lips.

She had scarcely expected Edgworth Bess would consent, but finding she did so, with the rapaciousness which formed part of her disposition, regretted that she had not named a smaller amount.

She was discontented with herself, though of all the poor creatures she had got at work for her, there was not one receiving so small a stipend as three shillings a week.

She consoled herself with the thought that she should be able to make a reduction.

"Them's the wages," she continued; "not much, perhaps you will say; but still, it's as much as I can afford in the present state of the trade. Then there's one more thing we have got to settle, and that's the hours."

"Yes, the hours," replied Edgworth Bess; "what are they?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking, they are rather long; though, to be sure, not so long as they might be."

"Indeed!" said Edgworth Bess, reviving a little at this intelligence. "What time should I have to be in the workroom every morning?"

"Why, now, you see, just at this time of year, when it's so dark, you workpeople have got the advantage. You do not come so many hours as in the summer, when there is more light to work by, you know."

"Yes, ma'am," assented the poor girl, who knew not what else to say, but who thought, as the woman paused, that she ought to say something.

"Being winter now, in course the hours is shorter—you would not be wanted to come earlier than half-past four."

"Half-past four?" Edgworth Bess involuntarily repeated.

"Yes; what have you to say against that?" asked the woman, tartly.

"Nothing—nothing; and when should I be done at night?"

"Twelve."

"Twelve o'clock at night?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, and clasped her hands over her brows.

"Them's the hours, young woman. You can have a job, if you think the place will suit you."

Edgworth Bess struggled a moment, and then she said:

"I accept it."

"And very wise of you, too, I should say. On, I forgot to tell you! There's something more, and we may as well have all things settled right off at once as not."

Edgworth Bess looked up, wondering what was coming next.

"You know, I don't allow my workpeople to go running out for their meals. It disturbs them at their work, and makes them lose too much time. I shall want you to bring all your meals with you when you come in the morning, and then, you know, you will have no occasion to disturb yourself by getting up and down from your work."

At the utterance of this last piece of monstrous iniquity Edgworth Bess groaned.

What a prospect had she before her!

She was not, however, allowed any time for reflection.

"Now, young woman," said the shopkeeper, "I have

no more time to waste with you. Them's the terms. If you likes to agree to them, why, I sets you on at once."

"Oh, ma'am!" exclaimed Edgworth Bess, in tones so pathetic that they would have made an impression upon anyone, save the obdurate being to whom they were addressed. "I am starving—absolutely starving! You will, therefore, comprehend that it is not in my power to refuse your terms, however hard they may be. I accept the place; but, before I begin to work, I must have something to eat."

"Oh, I have no objection to that! You can go down in the kitchen, and have something to eat, and welcome; but you must understand that what you have will be stepped out of your first week's wages; and not only that—I can't allow you to leave the premises until you have done sufficient work to make up the sum."

To these exactions poor Edgworth Bess was compelled to succumb.

She was wholly in the power of this monster in female form.

She had clutched her, and she could not escape.

After having delivered herself in the manner we have recorded, she took our heroine down into the kitchen, and placed before her a small quantity of the coarsest food.

Hunger, however, has a sharp tooth, and Edgworth Bess commenced eating ravenously.

Poor girl, her trials and sufferings, so far from being over, were only just beginning.

Having placed the food before her, the shopkeeper retired, leaving her to eat it in solitude and silence.

Many and bitter were the tears with which the unfortunate heiress washed down this sorry meal.

When she thought of the terrible price she would have to pay for what she had eaten, she shuddered, and the blood ran cold in her veins.

Three shillings a week!

That was the amount of the wages she was to receive, and out of that miserable pittance the stipulation was that she should find her own needles and thread.

This may seem a trifling matter, but it ceases to be so when it is considered in connection with three shillings a week.

These cheap and simple articles would in that time make a great hole in such a sum; and so poor Edgworth Bess was well aware, from previous sad experience.

And then, the hours!

It was winter, when it was cold and dark, and the were from half-past four until midnight.

That left four hours and a half to seek her lodgings, to sleep, and to return to the workroom.

Then there was to be no respite to this dreary time.

She was to take her seat at the hour first mentioned, and not quit it until the church clocks in the metropolis had chimed out the hour of midnight.

Her fingers would only stay their toil for a few moments while she hastily devoured the meals which she had been bidden to bring with her.

Such were the sad thoughts that occupied the mind of our heroine.

But she was not for long permitted to indulge in them.

The shrill voice of the shopwoman struck upon her ears.

"Now, young woman," she said, "if you've finished your vittles, come up here, and I'll show you the way to the workroom, and set you some to do!"

With a heavy heart, Edgworth Bess rose from the chair upon which she had been sitting, and crossing the dark kitchen, groped her way up the still darker staircase that conducted to the ground floor.

Here she found the shopwoman waiting for her.

"Have you finished your vittles?"

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply.

"I thought you had—you have had time enough, goodness knows! Come on after me, and you shall soon have something better to do than to sit down in idleness."

To these harsh and unfeeling words Edgworth Bess did not, and could not, make any reply.

She felt her heart swell, and so painful did it become, that she feared it would burst.

Silently, then, she followed the shopkeeper up so many flights of stairs, that when she reached the top she was ready to sink with exhaustion.

By clutching tightly at the balustrade, however, she sustained herself.

Pushing open a small door, the shopwoman strode into a room.

The poor heiress followed her.

She was greeted with a gush of foul and heated air, which had been generated in that small room by so many breaths.

A rustling sound, as the weary workers turned over their work, as occasion required, was the only sound that broke the otherwise intense silence.

Not a word was spoken—scarcely a look exchanged.

The poor girls were packed as closely together as they could be packed, and where Edgworth Bess was to find a seat was a mystery.

The shopkeeper, however, by compelling the crowded workers to sit closer together, contrived to make room for the new comer, who was greeted by her fellow-workers with a different expression, according to the nature of their disposition.

Some pitied her, others hated her; not one, however, welcomed her, or seemed glad to see her.

The majority felt sorry that another being had been inducted into their own miserable existence.

At the command of the shopkeeper, Edgworth Bess seated herself, and was then supplied with so large a quantity of work, that it positively looked disheartening.

Edgworth Bess knew that it was the hard labour of very many hours.

"There," said the shopkeeper, "I can't let you move until you have done all these, and then you will have earned what you have just eaten!"

CHAPTER CCCXXXVI.

EDGORTH BESS, MADDENED WITH SHAME AND GRIEF, TAKES A LEAP FOR DEATH INTO THE THAMES.

WITH a heart brimming over with despair and grief, Edgworth Bess took up one of the shrouds.

Needles and thread were placed before her, but she was carefully told that the amount they represented would be deducted from her wages at the end of the week.

Having seen her commence her work, the shopwoman retired.

When the door had closed behind her, our heroine ventured to look more closely at those who surrounded her than she had done hitherto.

Very little curiosity respecting herself was, however, manifested by any of them.

One glance at her fragile and attenuated frame seemed to suffice for them.

Not one spoke.

Edgworth Bess was surprised.

She had thought Mrs. Roblet's a most wretched place; but now her thoughts reverted to the time when she was there, and a feeling of absolute pleasure came over her at the recollection, so great was, comparatively speaking, the difference.

At Mrs. Roblet's, the girls, though compelled to work very hard, and a great many hours, were tolerably cheerful and happy, and they cheated time of much of its dullness by chatting to each other.

Now, all was silent as a nunnery.

Edgworth Bess could not work for her tears.

In vain she strove to force them back—they would throng into her eyes, and prevent her from seeing properly what she was about.

What chance would she have of finding Jack Sheppard now, and what chance would he have of finding her?

It would be quite impossible for her to seek for him, since it was clear that she would not be allowed sufficient time to take that rest which her body required.

Then, the idea that Jack would attempt to look for her there, seemed quite out of the question.

There was not, then, one cheering point to which she could direct her thoughts.

The blackness of despair alone presented itself before her.

She made but very little progress with her work.

All her companions noticed it, because their attention was much fixed upon her.

But they said nothing.

At length, one who sat next her whispered in her ear:

"You had better make more haste with your work, or you will catch it."

To this she made no reply, but asked how it was no one spoke.

"That is against the rules," answered this girl. "If any of us were caught talking by Mrs. Flume, we should all be fined."

"Who is Mrs. Flume?"

"The forewoman."

"The one that came in with me?"

"No!" was the reply, given in some surprise. "That is Mrs. Pike."

"Who is Mrs. Pike?"

"The woman who belongs to the house."

"Where is Mrs. Flume?"

"I don't know; she went out a little while ago, and has not returned. I dare not stop talking to you any longer. I am neglecting my work, and very likely Mrs. Flume is outside the door, listening. She often is; and then she bursts in all of a sudden, and, if she can't find out who has been talking, she threatens to fine all round alike, and so she is always sure to find out the right party. Hush!"

The speaker was suddenly silent.

Edgworth Bess was about to inquire the reason, when the door was opened, and a woman walked in, who, from her very manner, and the effect she produced upon the workwomen, she was sure was the very Mrs. Flume of whom they had just been speaking.

"I heard some one talking," said the new comer. "Who was it?"

All was as still as the grave.

"Who was it?" cried Mrs. Flume again, adopting a defiant attitude.

Another pause.

"If you don't speak, I'll fine you all round."

This seemed such an unjust proceeding, that Edgworth Bess was no longer able to continue silent.

"I spoke," she said.

The other girls stared at her aghast.

Not one of them had ever owned that they had been talking, as she had.

The plan was adopted of accusing one of their number, and the accused party was then fined.

It had never entered the minds of one of them to boldly avow that they had been talking.

Mrs. Flume appeared to be no less surprised.

She stared at Edgworth Bess, as though she had seen some remarkable creature.

"You spoke, did you?" she said, mocking our heroine's voice.

"I did."

"I s'pose you're the new hand Mrs. Pike spoke to me about?"

"Yes."

"Confound you, where's your manners?"

This time Edgworth Bess understood what was meant.

She corrected herself.

"Yes, ma'am," she said.

"Oh, indeed! Then step this way, and let me have a look at you. I always like to perogee the faces of the new hands."

Edgworth Bess stepped forward, as she was bidden.

Mrs. Flume took hold of her by the arm, rather rudely, and turned her round to the light.

As soon as the forewoman looked in her face, however, she started back, uttering a loud scream.

This was an occurrence which called forth our heroine's utmost astonishment, as well as roused all the other workwomen from their usual state of torpidity.

What could this mean?

Mrs. Flume seemed in danger of fainting.

"Oh, horror!" she exclaimed. "Oh, horror upon horror! The viper! Oh, dear me! What shall I do? I shall faint! No, I sha'n't! I'll call Mrs. Pike. Oh, the venomous viper!"

These ejaculations were no less extraordinary than the scream which she had at first given utterance to.

As for Edgworth Bess, she came at once to the conclusion that she was mad.

Nevertheless, in spite of this conviction, she observed all her actions with the greatest curiosity and interest.

Mrs. Flume dashed open the door of the workroom, and ran to the head of the stairs.



BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD ENTER THE HOUSE IN SPRING GARDENS.

Then, in a voice of extreme shrillness, she shouted:

"Mrs. Pike! Mrs. Pike! Oh, Mrs. Pike! My dear, kind mistress, do come up here! Oh, Mrs. Pike!"

"What's the matter, Flume?" asked a voice from below. Instead of replying in a rational manner to this very rational question, Mrs. Flume continued her extraordinary ejaculations.

"Make haste, Mrs. Pike! Oh, do, for goodness sake, make haste! You little think what you've got in your house at last!"

Mrs. Pike was alarmed at these ambiguous outcries, and hastened up the stairs as fast as her legs would carry her.

No sooner did she reach the top of the attic stairs, than Mrs. Flume made a rush at her, and dragged her into the workroom.

During the time this was taking place, Edgworth Bess remained standing in the same position, unable to move or do anything besides observe what was going forward.

"Oh, Mrs. Pike!" said Mrs. Flume, "you little think
No. 68.

what you have done! To think I should have been here the best part of my life, and then such a thing to occur! Oh, it makes my very hair stand on end, that it do! Oh, Mrs. Pike, what should you do without your faithful Flume?"

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Pike, nervously, who, from her forewoman's manner, every moment expected the disclosure of some terrible catastrophe. "Do tell me what's the matter!"

"Oh, Mrs. Pike, I don't know how to tell you—indeed I don't! And then, to think—Oh, dear!—oh, dear! It's dreadful! It gets dreadfuller and dreadfuller the more you think about it!"

"What—what, Flume? Tell me what, or you will drive me mad!"

"Me drive you mad, mem? Oh, dear, no! Not by no means; but you will go mad when I tell you!"

"What—what? Speak at once! Let me know the worst! Nothing can be more terrible than this mysterious suspense!"

"I'll tell you, Mrs. Pike. You know, whenever we has any new hands, I always perogees their faces, to see whether I know them, and so as to be able to recognise them again."

"Well—well, Flume, what of that?"

"Everything! You engaged a new hand while I was out. Of course, when I comes in, according to my duty, I begins to perogee her face. The moment I clapped my two blessed eyes upon it—oh, dear!—oh, dear!"

"What, Flume?"

"Oh, the viper! Oh, the scorpion! That ever such a baggage should come into a respectable workroom like this here! Oh, lauks! Well, after that, you might, in a manner of speaking, expect anything!"

"But you have not told me, Flume! Do you know the new hand?"

"Do I know her? Oh, mem!"

Mrs. Flume groaned, and turned up her eyes until only the whites were visible.

"You do know her?"

"Oh, yes, mem! I know her, and I know all her history! Oh, she's the most awfulest character as ever was known to be! She is called Edgworth Bess! That's her grand name, mem! Oh dear, yes; she used to work for Mrs. Roblet, in Lincoln's Inn Fields! But she left there, and she took up with a young rascal, named Jack Sheppard. He was a runaway apprentice, and then he turned highwayman, and housebreaker, and murderer! He murdered his old master, as you know very well, mem, because you must recollect all about it; and he was to be hung, but he broke out of prison; and this new hand of yours, mem, has tramped it all over the country with him; and I dare say she has come here on purpose to find out everything for him to be able to break in, and murder us all! Oh, mem! I shall faint—I know I shall!"

And Mrs. Flume, exhausted by her emotion, sank down upon a chair, in a collapsed condition.

Edgworth Bess was quite overcome by this disclosure; but she remained standing just where she was, for she had no power to stir.

Mrs. Pike was overcome, too.

A very particular, pious, upright woman was Mrs. Pike, and the thought of having such a desperate character in her house was awful in the extreme.

"Murder!" she gasped, at length. "We shall all be murdered in cold blood! Call the watch! Call the officers! Oh, what shall I do? I am a lost woman!"

Mrs. Flume began to utter her outcries again.

Edgworth Bess summoned up what courage she possessed.

Dreading capture at the hands of the myrmidons of the law, she made up her mind to make one desperate effort to escape.

With one rush she passed Mrs. Pike.

Mrs. Flume saw her movement, and tried to intercept her.

It was in vain.

The suddenness with which the poor girl darted forward overturned her, chair and all.

Still, Mrs. Flume continued her hold on the poor girl's apparel.

Fortunately for our heroine, this was old and rotten, and came away in the forewoman's grasp.

With the breathless speed of a hunted hare, Edgworth Bess rushed down the rickety staircase—how, she hardly knew.

At length the bottom was reached.

Flinging open the door, she dashed into the shop, and from thence into the street.

A wild cry came from the rear, but heeding it not, she flew onward.

Maddened by all that she had that day undergone, she tore along with all the fury of a maniac.

People made way for her, and allowed her to pass by.

It was evening, and the streets of the metropolis were involved in gloom.

Needless and unconscious of this, the young girl continued her frantic career.

The demon of madness had taken possession of her, and she knew not what she was about.

All her ideas were in inextricable confusion.

Her brain spun round and round.

Much had she suffered and put up with patiently, but this last scene of all was beyond endurance.

The cold and wintry wind swept past her; but she knew it not.

The snow came down in large fleecy masses, and covered the ground thickly, but of this she was unconscious also.

At length she was obliged to stay her progress.

She could go no further.

This roused her somewhat, and she looked round.

She was standing on the banks of the Thames, some distance above Westminster Bridge.

The lamps upon this structure were dimly visible through the falling snow, and so, too, were their reflections on the murky water.

Edgworth Bess clasped her hands over her forehead.

The plashing of the water suggested a new thought, and a most horrible one.

It was, that she would take one leap into that dark and turbid stream, and by that act put an end to the life which had been nothing but misery to her.

That she was mad when this idea took possession of her heated brain, there can be no doubt.

In her rational moments she would have shuddered and shrunk back from the bare contemplation of such a deed.

Now she experienced no such feeling.

It seemed to her as though, by one plunge into the water, she should obtain rest and peace—those two blessings which seemed to be denied her.

When this thought once crossed her morbid and excited imagination, it was followed up by a thousand thoughts, all urging her to do the deed.

The dark waters, as they surged up on the muddy shore, seemed to say to her, "Here is rest!"

She listened, and repeated these words over and over again.

Then she laughed a shrill, unmeaning laugh, which echoed far over the surface of the water.

Before her was a barge.

To get on to it would be easy—to spring off the other end of it into the water was more easy still.

In a moment her mind was made up.

With superhuman agility she sprang on to the clumsy vessel.

Someone was aboard.

It was the watchman.

He had been sleeping.

He felt something rush past him.

He looked up.

The dark and shadowy outlines of a female form met his gaze.

In a moment he understood all.

He stretched out his hand, and strove to grasp the flying figure.

But he was too late.

With another of those laughs, which were enough to curdle the blood in the veins of those who heard it, Edgworth Bess, a prey to madness, sprang from the prow of the barge into the Thames.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVII.

BLUESKIN AND JACK SHEPPARD SUCCEEDED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE HOUSE IN SPRING GARDENS.

WE left Blueskin and Jack Sheppard at the door of the mysterious house in Spring Gardens, along with the driver of the hackney-coach whom they had been fortunate enough to encounter.

The information which he had given them was correct in every particular, but it was given them too late.

Edgworth Bess had been in that house, but she had gone; for it was on the evening following the one upon which the interview between the young nobleman and Edgworth Bess had taken place that our friends stood before the door.

The result of that interview is known.

Through the assistance of the young nobleman, the persecuted heiress had left that infamous den, by needlessly adventuring into which her only protectors and friends were about to incur such deadly peril.

But Jack, and Blueskin, and the hackney-coachman had no idea of what had taken place on the preceding night, nor was there any means by which they could obtain such knowledge.

While they were standing needlessly here, Edgworth Bess was flying through the streets, with the fire of madness lighted up in her brain.

She was close to them, being merely divided by the River Thames.

Under the impression, however, that she was still in that handsome and imposing-looking house, they gazed eagerly at the polished door, and with straining eyes made out the number to be 57.

So far, then, the coachman's information was borne out by proofs.

"You see, gemmen," he said, "that I was quite right in what I told you."

"Yes, yes!" said Jack, hurriedly; "and nothing now remains but to decide upon the means by which the house shall be entered."

"Well, I leave that all to you; only, let me recommend you not on no account to use violence; because, if you do, you will be sure to be defeated. Everything must be done on the sly if you are to succeed."

"We will bear what you say in mind."

"Do so, gemmen. In the meantime, I'll look after my nags, and keep a sharp eye on this here blessed front door. When I see you with the gal, I will roll up in no time."

With this understanding, the driver returned to his coach, while Blueskin and Jack Sheppard conferred together as to the means they should adopt to enter the house.

"There's no mode so easy as the roof," said Jack, "and, so far as my experience goes, I should say that was the best manner."

"It is in most cases," said Blueskin. "The difficulty is in getting on to the roof."

"Ah, there it is!"

"Look up at this house, Jack, and see what a height it is. No doubt there is a trap-door on the roof, through which we could get easily enough; but the difficulty is to reach it."

"What means, then, do you propose, if you do not intend to try the roof?"

"We must reconnoitre first, before we decide upon anything. There is no knowing what we may discover. Besides, we ought to obtain all the information we can with respect to our situation, in case an emergency should occur."

"Right, my friend!" said Jack. "I must get you to think for me to-night, for my mind is not so clear as it generally is."

"I can tell that. You are excited by the importance of what we are about to do."

"How could I be otherwise?"

"It is nothing but natural. But come—if we stand talking here we shall be sure to excite suspicion, and our time is too precious to be lost."

As he spoke, Blueskin turned away from where he had been standing, and crept towards the next house to No. 57, which he examined attentively.

He was closely followed in all his movements by Jack Sheppard.

No. 56—for that was the number of the house before which they paused—was externally the same as No. 57.

Perceiving this, our friends next proceeded to look at No. 58.

They were not aware that Mother Robotham occupied two houses, instead of one.

Not only was No. 56 externally the same as No. 57, but internally also.

Upon reaching No. 58, the first thing that struck our friends when they glanced upon it was, that no light came from any of the windows.

Even the lamp outside the door was unlighted.

Blueskin closely examined the whole of the structure, and then, in a whisper, he said to his companion:

"I wonder whether this house is empty."

"It has the appearance of being to let. I was thinking so myself at the moment you spoke."

"If such should luckily prove to be the case," said Blueskin, "all will be easy. The question is, how are we to ascertain?"

"The coachman!"

"Thanks for that idea! Doubtless the coachman will be able to tell us. We will cross over to him."

As he spoke, Blueskin and Jack crossed over to the

opposite side of the street, where the hackney-coachman was waiting.

Observing their approach, he immediately came towards them.

"What now, gemmen?" he asked.

"We have been looking at the houses on each side of No. 57," replied Blueskin. "Do you happen to know whether that one is empty?"

He pointed at No. 58 as he spoke.

"You will perceive," added Jack, "that there is no light visible at any of the windows, and even the hall-lamp is not burning."

"It's to let," replied the coachman; "but whether it's empty is more than I can tell you."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I know it's to let, because I saw the card in the window myself the last time I was here by daylight. But don't you know that very often people are put to stay in these great houses until they are taken?"

"To be sure—to be sure! You think, then, that most likely there is someone in that house to let who has been placed there in charge of it?"

"Just so."

"Have you any particular grounds for thinking so?"

"No; nothing more than that I know such is usually the case."

"Thanks! That will do. Be careful to keep watch."

"All right, gemmen! You can depend upon me."

Once more Blueskin and Jack Sheppard made their way towards No. 58.

"Do you intend to risk entering it, Joe?" asked Jack Sheppard.

"I think so."

"By what means?"

"The front door."

"Why?"

"Because, if, as I suspect, the house is empty, the people who left it would fasten all the rest of the house as securely as possible, and merely lock the front door after them when they went away."

"I did not think of that."

"If this is the case, we sha'n't have much trouble. You have a picklock, have you not?"

"Yes; here it is."

"That will do, then. If, after we have shot back the lock, the front door gives way to our touch, we may safely assume that there is no one in it; because, if there was, they would take care to fasten it in some other way as well."

"Certainly—certainly! Come—I am all impatience to make the trial."

"Be careful. In an expedition like this you cannot make use of too much caution."

"I am aware of it."

"If can once get inside No. 58, we shall be able to make our way on to the roof of No. 57 without difficulty; for, if you look up, you will perceive the houses are just the same."

"They are."

The two friends had now reached the doorway of No. 58.

Jack held the little crooked piece of steel called a picklock in his hand, and he eagerly thrust it into the key-hole.

The lock was a large one, and this made Jack's task all the easier; for in those days the notion that the strength of a lock was in proportion to its size had not exploded.

Jack Sheppard only had to rattle the picklock a few times, and then he succeeded in taking a firm hold of the wards.

A dexterous twist of the wrist was all that was now required, and the next moment the bolt of the lock shot back with an alarming snap.

Blueskin pushed the door, impatient to a degree to know whether it would yield.

It gave way before the pressure he applied to it.

With a feeling of delight which we leave our readers to imagine, he pushed it open further still, until both were able to glide into the passage.

The next thing was to close the door, and then to remain perfectly still and listen.

The closing door raised a thousand echoes in the dreary building, but the reverberations gradually died away.

The interior of the hall was very dark, and our two friends found themselves unable to see anything.

Total darkness did not, however, prevail, and of this they soon became conscious.

Through the fanlight that was over the door there came a faint, misty kind of twilight; and, as they stood listening, they gradually became able to see about them.

In front was a broad staircase.

This, however, they did not yet venture to ascend, until assured that they had not disturbed anyone by their surreptitious entrance.

The continued silence at length inspired them with confidence.

Convinced that if anyone had been in the house their entrance must have been heard, they reasonably enough came to the conclusion that they were the sole inmates of it, and in this opinion they were strengthened by having found the door merely locked, and not bolted.

It was some strange kind of instinct, however, that made them creep across the hall on tiptoe.

Then the stairs were reached.

When once they had taken hold of the massive balustrades, it was easy enough to ascend, although they had to feel their way.

A light would have been very serviceable to them, and they had the means of procuring one, but judged it would be dangerous, lest their presence in the empty house should become known.

This was what they had most of all to dread, so they submitted to the alternative of receiving a few bruises.

At length, without the occurrence of any particular incident, the top of the stairs was reached.

They now stood on the landing from which the doors of the attics opened.

Here, then, was where our friends expected to find a trap-door which would enable them to gain the roof.

To discover this, a light was, however, necessary.

At all risks they would have to show a light, if for a moment only, for otherwise the position of the trap-door could not be discovered.

Jack Sheppard had some thieves' matches in his pocket, and one of these he ignited.

A tiny flame came from the small piece of wood, and endured for a few seconds only; still, as Jack held it in the air, it enabled them to find that of which they were in search.

They saw the outlines of the trap-door, but it was in the ceiling, high above their heads, and to reach it seemed almost an impossibility.

Upon this they conferred for a few moments, and then agreed to ignite another match, and take one more glance around them, in the hope of being able to find something that would assist them to reach the trap-door.

Jack accordingly lighted the second match.

It was now that they noticed something which had before escaped their observation.

Near them was a large cupboard, or wardrobe, such as are frequently to be found in this position.

This at once suggested to Blueskin a means of reaching the ceiling.

He saw the key was sticking in the lock, so he opened one of the folding-doors, with which the cupboard was fitted, without difficulty.

Some bare shelves were then exposed to view.

More than that he saw not, for at this moment the match went out.

Still it had served the purpose admirably.

By the aid of the shelves, Blueskin succeeded in reaching the top of the wardrobe; and, when in this position, it was perfectly easy for him to push the trap-door open.

This done, he placed one foot on the edge of the open door, and grasping the edges of the trap-door with his hands, easily drew himself up.

He was now standing between the ceiling and the tiles.

Here he remained, and lent Jack all the assistance in his power to reach him.

Jack Sheppard was lithe and agile, and he performed this feat with even greater ease than his companion had done.

The only thing that now had to be done was to withdraw the two bolts by which the outer trap-door was secured, and push it open.

To do this took them a few moments only.

The bolts appeared to be literally rusted into their sockets, and they had some trouble in withdrawing them, but at length they succeeded.

The outer side of the trap-door was covered with sheet-lead, which made it a great weight, and very difficult to move.

Slowly, however, they raised it, and pushed it from its position until they had left a space sufficiently large for them to creep through.

More than this they did not require, so without attempting to move it any further they got on to the roof.

The tiles were very steep, and they had to exercise great caution in making their way over them, as a single false step would have precipitated them to the ground beneath.

Clinging with their hands to the slight projections caused by the tiles lapping over each other, they slowly crept along.

The distance was very short to the trap-door in the roof of No. 57, but our friends were a long time reaching it.

Their progress was slow in the extreme, but at last, to their infinite satisfaction, they arrived at the wished-for spot.

A serious difficulty now presented itself.

The trap-door through which they had just passed was bolted on the inside.

From this, would it not be reasonable to infer that the other was fastened in a similar manner?

If this was the case, how were they to raise the trap-door from the outside?

Its weight alone, and their awkward, insecure position, would make this feat one of great danger to attempt; but should it be fastened, what then?

Our friends, however, did not suffer themselves to dwell long upon this subject.

Taking hold of two corners of the trap-door, they endeavoured to raise it.

They scarcely hoped to succeed when they made the attempt.

Their surprise and pleasure may, therefore, be imagined when they found they could lift it with comparative ease.

This was indeed unexpected good fortune.

It seems strange, however, that this trap-door should have been thus left unsecured.

But we must remind the reader that No. 57 was a strange house, in which strange things continually took place.

The fact of the trap-door being unbolted ought to excite but a small amount of surprise.

There was a motive for it, and with this motive we shall probably in a short time become acquainted.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVIII.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN WITNESS SOME EXTRAORDINARY SCENES IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE IN SPRING GARDENS.

DISPOSED as they at first were to discredit such good fortune, Blueskin and Jack Sheppard quickly found that the trap-door really was not secured in any way.

All they had to do was to remove it sufficiently from the space it covered to enable them to slip through.

Had their positions upon the slanting tiles been less awkward than it was, this would have been an easy matter.

As it was, it became difficult in the extreme.

The trap-door, owing to the sheet-lead with which it was covered, was very heavy, and they found it almost an impossibility to raise it.

They ran a fearful risk at every fresh attempt they made, but undauntedly they again and again applied themselves to their task, stimulated by the hope of rescuing Edgeworth Bess from great peril and danger.

Slowly, then, the heavy door was shifted from its position, but they ceased their efforts as soon as ever they were able to slip through.

Jack was the first to descend.

Cautiously squeezing himself between the frame and the door, he presently stood upon the inner trap-door.

He moved aside to permit his companion to follow him, and in another moment the two comrades were side by side.

What they had now to do was to remove the inner trap-door, but in doing this there was some danger of discovery; for, situated as they were, they could not tell who was beneath.

Their first proceeding was to kneel down and listen.

No sound, however, reached their ears.

Encouraged by the silence, they now ventured to remove the inner trap-door, which consisted merely of a square piece of wood.

This, however, they slipped aside gradually, and as soon as they were able to see down, they stopped.

The first glance reassured them.

No one was in sight.

Noiselessly and speedily the inner trap-door was raised and placed on one side.

The landing below was now fully revealed.

There was a faint, soft light diffused over it, which came from a lamp at the turn of the staircase.

A gush of warm, perfumed air came into their faces, at once conveying the idea of luxury and voluptuousness.

The balustrades of the staircase were handsome, and the landing was covered with a carpet of exquisite pattern and texture, corresponding with that upon the stairs.

Jack was amazed, for he had never seen anything of this description before.

He was aroused by Blueskin, who warned him that he had no time to gaze about him.

Thus reminded, he once listened, and then, finding the silence unbroken, lowered himself through the trap-door.

He clung to the frame with his hands, and when the full extent of his arms was reached, his feet were but a short distance from the floor.

That he should be able to alight upon the carpet beneath without making much noise he felt confident, and therefore he released his hold without hesitation.

He took care to drop upon his toes, and by this means the violence of the concussion was reduced as much as possible.

His first act, however, was to spring to the stair-head and listen.

No indications of an alarm having been given reached his ears, and he made a sign with his hand to Blueskin to follow his example and descend.

Our old friend obeyed instantly, though of necessity he made more noise in alighting than his lighter and more agile companion.

Scarcely, however, had his feet touched the ground, than a scream arose of so awful a character as seemed to freeze the very blood in their veins, and deprive them of all power of motion.

Their first impulse was to clasp their hands over their ears, and shut out the terrible cry.

The scream came again, and their second impulse was to rush downstairs.

Fortunately, Blueskin restrained himself, and was in time to clutch Jack by the collar, and hold him back.

"Caution!" he said, in a hoarse, guttural whisper. "Are you mad?"

Jack struggled for an instant to release himself, and then became still as he grew conscious of the sense of Blueskin's injunction.

"Be cautious, Jack! Do not let anything cause you to forget the danger which must result from a discovery. You must not be surprised at anything that takes place here."

"But those screams!" said Sheppard, in the same energetic yet whispering tone. "They were terrible! They ring in my ears now!"

"Be careful, I say again, and then doubtless we shall discover all!"

Jack became silent, but nodded his head acquiescingly to his comrade's remarks.

Like spectres they stole down the stairs.

The sound must have come from below, because they were in the highest part of the house.

But it was this alone which afforded them a guide.

Had it not been for this accidental circumstance, they would have been at a loss to say whether the screams came from above or below, or from all sides at once.

After the two shrieks all was still.

There was no bustle or alarm as though anyone had been aroused by them.

The house still maintained its oppressive, silent character,

Impatient in the extreme, however, to learn the exact signification of those frightful shrieks—which they could not help thinking were, in some way or other, connected with Edgworth Bess—Blueskin and Jack descended to the next landing.

This was by far more spacious than the one above it, and indications of the greatest luxury were everywhere apparent.

From it numerous doors opened.

A low, moaning sound now became audible.

It was continuous, and our friends listened intently in order to determine the precise direction from which it came.

This they found puzzling, and they were in the end compelled to listen at each door.

All were closed.

At length they paused before one from which the sounds appeared to come with increased distinctness.

After listening more attentively, they became convinced that it was from this source they proceeded.

Another fact also obtruded itself upon their notice.

As they leaned slightly against the door to listen, they found it give way before them.

It was not fastened.

As soon as they made this discovery, they ceased to press against it.

They found the door was now sufficiently ajar to enable them to see into the room.

To their surprise, nothing was visible but darkness.

The door had been pushed close to, but the latch had not caught, and now that it was opened a little way, the moaning sound became more audible, so that, beyond all doubt, they were in the right direction.

Finding all was dark, Blueskin pushed the door a little further open, until, in fact, he could put his head into the room.

The first glance explained everything, and, somewhat to Jack's surprise, his comrade entered, and beckoned to him to follow.

Jack Sheppard obeyed immediately.

He found himself in a dark room.

Blueskin closed the door softly behind him.

Turning round, Jack now perceived that at some distance was another door leading into an inner chamber.

This door was only partially shut, and it could be seen that the apartment with which it communicated was illuminated with tolerable brilliancy.

Blueskin grasped Jack by the hand, and then both stole on tiptoe to the second door.

They reached it without creating a sound, for the floor was covered with a carpet of such thickness that their feet sank into it at every step, and precluded all possibility of sound.

Mingled with the moaning, they could now distinguish someone speaking in a harsh tone of voice, and eagerly they listened to catch the words that were uttered.

They filled them with surprise, and so did the scene which they beheld, for the crevice between the hinges of the door, as it stood partly open, enabled them to command a view of this inner room.

The same luxurious style of furnishing was visible, and the light proceeded from a handsome candelabra, which stood upon a table.

A large and cheerful fire was blazing in the grate, and the whole appointments of the room were superb.

But although their eyes took in all this at one comprehensive glance, yet it did not retain their attention.

They were wholly absorbed by the living creatures they beheld within.

The first person they saw was Mother Robotham.

They had no doubts about the matter, for the description of her personal appearance which they had received from the driver of the hackney-coach was so graphic and complete, that they recognised her in an instant.

Her countenance had now assumed an unusual amount of fiery rubicundity.

It was, too, distorted with the most fiendish wrath that our friends had ever seen depicted in anyone's features.

In one hand she held a long, thick strap, but which, however, despite her fury, she made no attempt to use.

Crouching down in a corner was a young girl.

She it was who was moaning so bitterly, and doubtless it was from her lips that those horrible shrieks had come.

Only one glance was needed to show Blueskin and

Jack that this was not Edgworth Bess, as they had at first feared.

There was no resemblance whatever.

Satisfied upon this head, they began to look about them with greater calmness than they had hitherto been able to command.

Curiosity was now the dominant feeling.

They at once turned their attention to the third person who appeared upon the scene.

This was the one who had spoken with the harsh voice.

He was speaking still.

It was a man—but a man more out of keeping in manner and appearance with the apartment in which he stood could not possibly be found.

He was tall and stout.

His apparel, which was rich and of good material, was soiled and torn.

It was, too, in the utmost disorder, and seemed to indicate that he had either begun to undress himself, or else had dressed himself with great rapidity.

His face was inflamed with wine and passion, and his eyes sparkled with anger.

His hands were clenched tightly, and his whole attitude was menacing to a degree.

"I tell you what it is," were the words which first fell upon the ears of the two unexpected listeners—"I tell you what it is, Mother Robotham, curse me if I put up with this sort of thing any longer! I don't trouble you much, but I'll let you know I am master here. Just you touch my little Milly again, and I'll lay the strap about your own filthy carcass!"

Mother Robotham muttered something, but it was in too low a tone for our friends to catch it.

She glared at the man, but did no more.

Perhaps she knew from experience that she was no match for the burly fellow who stood before her.

If she submitted, however, it was with a very bad grace, and the strap shook in her grasp as though she longed to inflict a blow with it.

"Do you hear what I say, Mother Robotham?" asked the man fiercely. "Do you hear what I say?"

"Yes, I hear you!" was the reply. "But how do you expect me to do any good when you encourage these hussies to set me at defiance? But I'll—"

"No threats, mother—no threats! Raise your hand against Milly if you dare!"

"Do you know what she has done?"

"No, I don't, and curse me if I care!"

"What right had you, then, to burst into the room like you did, and interfere with what you knew nothing about?"

"The best of all rights, mother," was the reply. "I am master here, and you shall know it!"

The old woman muttered something which was inaudible.

Then, in a louder voice, she added:

"It's all very well for you to come interfering, but just through this minx we have lost the best chance of getting a trifle that ever we had. Old Sam brought in a young chap not long ago. He was an officer on board a ship, and had reached London this very day. His pockets were crammed with money, for he had just come off a long cruise."

"Oh, curse your tales! I don't want to hear them!"

"But you shall hear them! How often is it that we lime a bird so well feathered as this young officer? Why, not once in a twelvemonth! Old Sam picked him up and brought him in. He was quite muzzy when he came, so we should have been able to deal with him easily enough. He was introduced, you know, and picked out Milly here; and when they were together, instead of her plying him with drink, as she ought to have done, she told him to fly—th t his life and money were in danger; and the consequence was, the young sailor jumped through the window and made off!"

Although he had at first said he did not want to listen to her tales, the burly man became visibly interested as she proceeded.

His face glowed with additional anger, but this time it seemed as though the girl whom he had saved from violence was the object of it.

He looked at her crouched-up figure fiercely, and when

Mother Robotham had finished speaking, he said, angrily

"Is this the truth?"

"Every word of it!"

"But the young officer did not get off?"

"Yes, he did—clear off; and after she had told him what she had! It's enough to ruin us! And the young fellow's pockets were crammed with gold!"

A terrible oath came from the lips of this man, who now seemed about to change from the young girl's defender to her persecutor.

With a lowering countenance, he strode across the room, and seized her rudely by the arm.

The young girl uttered a cry of pain and fear, for the grip was so tight as to hurt her sadly.

Timidly and terrified, however, she glanced into the burly ruffian's face, and what she saw there made her dread the worst.

"Mercy—mercy!" she cried, imploringly. "Oh, pray have mercy upon me! Spare me—spare me!"

The man looked at her as though he would read her very soul, as he asked:

"Is what Mother Robotham has just said the truth? Tell me at once, or you shall suffer for it!"

The young girl was silent, and trembled like an aspen-leaf.

"Is it the truth?" asked the man, threateningly.

"I—I—warned—the young officer—of—of—his danger!"

"Oh, you did, curse you, did you?" said the man, with a horrible imprecation. "I am sorry I interfered!"

CHAPTER CCCXXXIX.

JACK SHEPPARD IS ENTIRELY OVERWHELMED BY THE TERRIBLE THINGS HE HEARS RESPECTING EDGWORTH BESS.

THE poor girl uttered a shriek of dismay when the man spoke these words, and in the most imploring and piteous accents, she said:

"Spare me—spare me! Have mercy upon me!"

Mother Robotham came a step nearer.

A strange look was on her face.

It was compounded of rage and triumph.

The young girl retreated as far as she was able, but that was not far.

The man held her too firmly for that.

Mother Robotham crept still nearer.

She wished, by the slowness of her movements, to inflict upon her victim the tortures of suspense.

She raised the strap in the air with sickening deliberation.

Then addressing the man, she said:

"It is not too late for you to repair the mischief you have done. Hold her tight, and we will punish her as she deserves. If she screams much, put your hand over her mouth, and stifle her cries. They might annoy someone, and there's several particular visitors in the house."

"All right, mother!" was the reply, uttered with ferocious willingness. "Lace her well. I'll hold her. She deserves to be hung, drawn, and quartered!"

Mother Robotham was now satisfied, and flourished the strap round her head, preparatory to striking the first blow.

The poor girl uttered a shriek.

It was wrung from her by the thought of what she was about to suffer.

She renewed her entreaties, but they were not heeded.

The man who had interfered to save her from ill-usage, and who seemed to have some power over Mother Robotham herself, was now as desirous that she should be punished as the infamous woman was.

"We'll see whether you are to spoil our trade, and get us into trouble into the bargain! You shall bitterly rue the consequences. You shall be well punished for what you have done, and then perhaps you won't do the same trick again, for fear of receiving the same reward. Take—"

Mother Robotham paused suddenly and abruptly in what she was about to say.

She did not finish her sentence, though the utterance of one more word would have completed it.

Nor did she strike her intended blow, although the strap was actually descending upon her unhappy and helpless victim.

She had great reason for not doing so. To explain this mystery, however, it will be necessary to revert to the proceedings of Jack Sheppard and Blueskin.

It was not long before they fully comprehended all that was taking place before them.

Enough had been said by the different actors in the scene to make all clear to them.

Part they knew—the remainder they could easily surmise.

When they saw the turn affairs were taking, they did not hesitate what to do.

They scarcely thought of the risk they should run, and the obstacles they should place in the way of the achievement of their enterprise.

Still less did they consider the amount of danger they would personally incur.

But both felt that it was quite impossible for them to remain passive spectators of the scene which was about to be enacted.

The idea of a girl being barbarously ill-used was abhorrent to them.

No consideration would have sufficed to hold them back.

To stand by and see a poor girl brutally flogged for saving the life and property of another was what they could not possibly do.

Their presence in the house would infallibly become known.

But for this they cared nothing.

Their feelings were wrought up to the highest pitch.

They resolved, upon the impulse of the moment, to do that of which calm reasoning would approve.

They determined to rush forward, and, by their active interposition, prevent the perpetration of this deed of brutality.

They were inadequately armed for the conflict which they were quite certain would ensue; but, reckless of all this, they resolved to make the attack.

Jack Sheppard, however, had his wits about him, and he employed them to his advantage.

His quickness and fertility of invention were really wonderful, and they were scarcely ever better exhibited than on the present occasion.

They had not been listening at the door long before he discovered that the apartment into which they had thus surreptitiously made their way was fitted up as a bedchamber.

The light which came from the inner room enabled him to see this.

The outlines of the bed were clearly distinguishable.

A fresh thought darted into Jack's mind, and he sprang towards it.

Hastily he seized the two pillows that were upon it.

They were very large feather ones.

With one in each hand, he rushed towards the door.

It gave way before him.

With a swift and well-directed aim, he flung one pillow at the candelabra on the table.

It overturned it with a crash, and the candles were extinguished in a moment.

Almost simultaneously he discharged the second pillow with full force at the head of Mother Robotham.

It was this which had so suddenly checked her in what she was about to say and do.

They followed up the attack closely.

Long ere Mother Robotham and her associate could recover themselves from their astonishment, our two friends were upon them.

Blueskin seized the burly man from behind, and held him in a grasp of iron.

"Let go your hold upon that girl," he cried, "or, as sure as you now breathe, I will blow your brains out!"

The man let go in a moment.

He was almost frightened to death by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the attack.

The idea that was uppermost in his mind was, that the young sea officer who had made his escape had returned with a body of police officers.

The darkness of the place puzzled and confused both him and Mother Robotham, and they were at a loss to think by what means the sudden extinguishment of the candles had been brought about, and more puzzled still to think what could be the meaning of it.

Having thrown the pillows, Jack Sheppard seized hold of Mother Robotham.

She uttered a dismal yell of apprehension.

"Hold your row," cried Jack, "without you want me to stop your breath for you!"

"Murder—murder!"

"Silence, I say, or it will be the worse for you!"

The poor girl, who had been thus unexpectedly saved from such ill-usage, lost her consciousness, and, when the man released his grasp, she fell at full length upon the floor.

Blueskin had but little trouble with the man himself.

He was a thorough coward, and did not offer the least resistance.

Under these circumstances, it was perfectly easy for Blueskin to remove his voluminous neckcloth and tie his arms firmly behind his back with it.

Finding that Mother Robotham paid no attention to his commands, Jack slipped off her apron, and twisting it round until its shape resembled a rope, he placed it over her mouth and tied it firmly at the back of her head.

She was now wholly incapacitated from making a noise.

Indeed, she found it a matter of some difficulty to be able to breathe.

Jack hastened to follow up his advantage, and in a moment or so had Mother Robotham bound hand and foot, and lying on the floor in a perfectly helpless condition.

He then turned towards Blueskin, with the intention of rendering him some assistance.

But he found that his services were not needed.

Unaided, Blueskin had succeeded in securing the man, and was now endeavouring to restore the poor girl to consciousness.

Jack Sheppard knelt down by his side.

Should they not be interrupted, they doubted not that they should be able to glean some important information from this girl, upon whose gratitude they had certainly established a claim.

The house was a strange one.

The terrible shrieks the young girl had uttered would, one would have thought, have had the effect of bringing every inmate of the house to the scene of action.

But no one came, and no notice whatever appeared to be taken of them.

Apparently the same result would follow the noise of the attack and the cries of Mother Robotham.

In fact, brawls and disturbances of various kinds were so very common in that house that no one troubled themselves when they heard a shriek or two, but contented themselves with thinking that it was none of their business.

So on the present occasion, although several had heard the "row," as they termed it, yet none of them thought for a moment of interfering.

This was what Mother Robotham herself had repeatedly enjoined; but now, as she lay writhing on the floor and gasping for breath, she bitterly repented having done so.

Both her and her no less infamous associate were, however, so thoroughly helpless that our two friends ceased to trouble themselves in the slightest degree about them.

They could make no noise, and were powerless to make any attack upon them or leave the room.

The young girl received, then, the whole of their attention, and they soon had the satisfaction of perceiving her come back to life, and open her eyes.

Assuringly and soothingly Jack spoke to her, telling her that she had no longer anything to fear, and that they would see her in safety out of that horrible abode.

She thanked them earnestly.

The room was too dark for them to see each other's faces distinctly, but Jack soon remedied that by going up to the fire and causing it to burst into a bright blaze by giving it a vigorous poke or two.

The room was then tolerably well illuminated.

At her request, the young girl was raised to her feet, and again she poured out her thanks to our two friends for their timely interference.

"How you came to be here, I know not," she said.

"But, oh, take me away, or they will kill me!"

"We will take you away, never fear!" said Blueskin;

"but we want you to give us some information."

"What, what—tell me, what!" I shall rejoice if I am

able to do anything to repay you for what you have done for me."

"Our errand here," said Blueskin, "concerns a young girl like yourself. Do you know anything of her?"

"Who is she?"

"I forgot. I have not yet given you any particulars. The young girl we wish to find was, we are informed, brought here in an insensible state a few days ago. Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes, yes!"

"What?"

"A young girl was brought here some days ago," replied the girl.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard exchanged glances at this corroboration of what the hackney-coachman had told them, and whatever doubts might have lingered in their minds were now completely dissipated.

"Tell me all you know concerning her," said Jack, in a tone of voice which showed how deeply he was interested in the inquiry. "Do not omit any one particular, no matter how unimportant it may seem. In the first place, however, describe the appearance of the young girl to whom you allude."

This was done, and the description given entirely corresponded with the appearance of Edgworth Bess.

Jack groaned at the simple words fell from the girl's lips, and she looked up at him, surprised at the exhibition of such extraordinary emotion.

"Go—on!" he cried, when she had ended her description. "Go on! Tell me what else took place!"

"Mother Robotham brought her here in a hackney-coach. She seemed almost dying—I fancy more from want of food than anything else. She was placed in a bed, and every attention paid to her. In a short time she perfectly recovered, and then Mother Robotham proceeded to make use of her."

"Make use of her?" cried Jack, vehemently. "How—what? Explain yourself."

"She dressed her out in the very best apparel, and then led her to a magnificent room downstairs, where she left her, and where a young nobleman who frequents this house was introduced to her."

At hearing these terrible words, Jack clasped his hands over his face and groaned bitterly.

Blueskin placed his hand upon his shoulder kindly.

"Cheer up!" he said, in an assuring voice as he could command. "Do not give up yet, but wait and hear all that this girl has to say. We have not heard all."

"I dread to hear any more than has just fallen upon my ears," replied Jack, mournfully.

The young girl's countenance exhibited the utmost degree of curiosity and surprise.

"I have told you the worst about her," she said.

"There, Jack!" said Blueskin. "She says she has told you the worst."

"Let me hear all!" cried Sheppard. "Where is she now? Take me to her—take me to her at once!"

"Impossible!"

"No—no! Not impossible! Where is she?"

"I know not."

"Know not? Did you not say, a moment ago, that a young nobleman was introduced to her?"

"Yes."

"Well—where is she?"

"I tell you, I do not know."

"How—why?"

"Because she left the house with him, and I have never heard or seen anything of either of them since."

This was terrible information.

For a moment Jack Sheppard stood looking at the young girl with a countenance expressive of blank despair.

He did not groan now—he did not move.

His agony was too great to be exhibited in any ordinary manner.

Suddenly his countenance changed.

An expression of fierceness came over it.

"Here is some terrible juggle," he cried—"I will not believe it! Lying wench! Is this your gratitude to us for having saved you from the dreadful punishment with which you were threatened? Retract your words—retract them in a moment! Tell me that all you have just said is false!"

CHAPTER CCOXL.

JACK SHEPPARD AND BLUESKIN ARE INTERRUPTED IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

CARRIED away by the insensate fury of his grief, Jack Sheppard seized the girl with so much violence, that she cried out with the pain his grasp occasioned. But, altogether heedless of this, Jack continued to give utterance to the torrent of words with which the last chapter concluded.

It was well that he was not alone.

It was well that he had one with him whose intellect was clear, and whose mind was less excited than his own.

Blueskin, although for a moment stunned, as it were, by the terrible revelation which had just been made, recovered himself quickly, and occupied himself in restraining the violence of his young companion.

He knew too well the character and disposition of Edgworth Bess to believe that she had voluntarily left the house with the young nobleman in the equivocal manner suggested.

If she had really gone, he felt certain in his own mind that she had some good and pure motive for so doing.

At once, then, he made Jack acquainted with his thoughts; and there was something so plausible in what he said, that Sheppard immediately grew calm, and felt ashamed of himself for having, for a moment, harboured an evil thought against her.

"You are right, Blueskin!" he said—"you are quite right! I am unfitted for this inquiry; question the girl yourself."

"Willingly, Jack! We ought to feel glad that chance has thrown us in the way of obtaining such information, without which we should have wandered in vain over this house, and exposed ourselves to a thousand dangers."

"Go on!" replied Jack; "question her! Obtain from her all the information she is able to give you."

Having thus spoken, Jack Sheppard turned aside and indulged in his emotions.

He felt it to be quite out of his power to obtain the mastery of them.

Perceiving this, and not without hope that by further inquiry he should learn something more assuring, Blueskin did not offer to interrupt him, but turned his attention to the girl, who was sobbing violently, and down whose cheeks the tears were rolling plentifully.

"Forgive the harshness and impetuosity of my friend," he said. "If you know how much he has at stake in this matter, you would cease to wonder at the violence which he has shown. He is most deeply interested in all that concerns the young girl about whom we are making these inquiries. For his sake, then, let me ask you to tell me all you know, and to reserve no single circumstance."

"I will, indeed I will!" she sobbingly replied. "In fact, I have already told you almost all. During her illness I frequently waited upon her, and I am sure there is no doubt about her being the same. Then, as I said, Mother Robotham had her dressed off in the best style, and introduced to the young nobleman. What passed between them I know not. They remained in the room some time together, and then came forth. Her hand was resting on his arm. In the hall they encountered Mother Robotham. A quarrel took place between them, which terminated in the young nobleman leading her out of the house. More than this I know not, for I have not seen either of them since."

At this plain and straightforward narrative, about the truth of which Blueskin had no doubt, his emotions almost overcame him.

The conclusions that were to be deduced from it were terrible.

There was something in the conduct of Edgworth Bess which he could not comprehend.

In fact, all was doubt, confusion, and dismay.

By a tremendous effort, he mastered his feelings.

"Who was this young nobleman?" he asked. "Tell me his name."

"Alas! I know it not."

"But you said that he was in the habit of frequenting this house."

"So he is, sir; but I do not know his name, for all that. We never learn their names."



EDGWORTH BESS IS RESCUED FROM THE RIVER.

"I see, I see! And you said he was a nobleman. How did you learn his rank?"

"By his dress."

"True—I forgot that. When did these events take place?"

"Last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"Then if we had come here last night, instead of to-night, we should have been able to intercept her?"

"Probably you would, sir, for she was here until nearly daybreak."

Another groan from Jack Sheppard made Blueskin aware that he was listening to all that was taking place, and had just become conscious of this last piece of intelligence.

Blueskin himself clasped his hands in despair.

"Alas, alas!" he cried; "what is now to be done? Once more, it seems, we are without the slightest clue to guide us!"

No. 69.

The girl for awhile was silent. At length she said:

"I am sorry I could not give you any better news; but I assure you, sir, that I have spoken the truth."

"I do not doubt you," said Blueskin, "I do not doubt you for a moment; and our best thanks are due to you for the information you have given us, unpleasant as it is. Without it, we should have been exposing our lives in vain. Accept our best thanks."

"Nay, it is from me that the thanks are due," said the girl, "for having saved me from the ill-treatment to which I was about to be subjected; and if——"

"If what? Speak freely. Do not be afraid to give utterance to anything which you might wish to say."

"I was about to ask you to place me under still further obligation to you."

"In what manner? Again I say, do not be afraid to speak."

"I imagined, then, that, as the girl of whom you are in search is no longer here, you would shortly leave this place."

"Such is our intention. We can do no good by remaining here, and therefore it behoves us to be gone."

"I thought so, sir, and——"

"What is it you wished us to do?"

"To allow me to accompany you out of this house."

"Most willingly!"

"Thanks—oh, thanks! I will not trouble you any further than to allow me to go with you to the front door. Once in the street, I shall not care. If I remain in the house, I am sure to be ill-treated, perhaps murdered; for I can assure you, sir, the people here are by no means particular as to what they do. And to leave this house, unless under your protection, would be impossible."

"Think nothing of that—think nothing of that!" said Blueskin, soothingly. "We will willingly enough see you free from this den. Indeed, we should have done so had you not made the request."

"Thanks, thanks!"

"We will leave at once," said Blueskin; and as he spoke he turned round towards his comrade.

Jack Sheppard was wholly overcome.

The information he had just received was by far of a more terrible character than he had anticipated.

Not in moments of the blackest and deepest despair had he pictured to himself anything so dreadful as this.

Nothing could be worse.

At first, Blueskin found all his efforts to rouse him vain.

He had sunk down on a kind of ottoman near the fire.

His head was buried in his hands, and his whole attitude denoted the deepest and most abject grief.

By degrees, however, Blueskin succeeded in making himself heard.

"Come, Jack!" he said, "be a man—be firm! Things look bad now; but, then, their aspect may be altered. There is not much room for hope, I confess; still, I think you ought not to give up without further proof than you at present possess. No further good will result from our remaining in this house. Let us, then, leave it, while we have an opportunity of doing so. Come, Jack, come!"

"No matter, no matter, Blueskin! Leave me here—as well leave me here as anywhere. Seek your own safety, and do not heed mine, for I no longer heed it myself!"

"I will not!" replied Blueskin, "I cannot! How do you know under what circumstances Edgworth Bess left the house? It may be that she won upon the sympathies of the young nobleman so far as to induce him to escort her from this house; and, at the present moment, it may be that she is waiting in some place of security for us to present ourselves before her."

This was but a frail hope, and Blueskin felt that it was so; but still, no better suggested itself upon the spur of the moment, and he had the satisfaction of perceiving that, slight as it was, Jack Sheppard caught at it.

He removed his hands from his face, and, looking up, said:

"It may be so—Blueskin, it may be so; for I cannot bring myself to think that Edgworth Bess would leave the house in the manner intimated. Blueskin, I feel that you are right!"

"That is well, then. Rise and quit this house, and we shall at least have some opportunity of ascertaining whether this surmise is, or is not, correct."

"We shall," said Jack, starting to his feet, and trying to banish the remnant of his emotion.

"Be careful!" said Blueskin; "I fancy that we shall find it by far more difficult to leave this place than we did to enter it!"

"By what means do you propose to leave it?"

"I have not thought of that. Doubtless, upon this point the girl will be able to give us important information by telling us which would be the easiest and the readiest means for us to gain the street."

"Ask her; doubtless, from having been an inmate of this house, she will be able to tell you what you desire to know."

Blueskin turned round, and once more addressed himself to the girl, who had been watching them eagerly during the time this little conference had taken place.

"Tell me," said Blueskin, "which do you think will be the best way for us to quit this house?"

The young girl made no immediate reply, and Blueskin, fancying she did not understand his question, added:

"I mean, which way can we leave this house so as to incur the smallest possible amount of danger?"

"I understand you, sir," was the reply; "I was considering which would be the best."

"Take time to reflect; by no means reply hastily."

"The principal people in the house are here," said the girl, pointing to the prostrate forms of Mother Robotham and her associate; "we shall have no one but the servants to contend with."

"In which way should we stand the best chance of avoiding them?"

"I do not think you could do better than descend the staircase into the hall, and pass out by the front door."

"Who shall we be likely to meet?"

"I think only the porter, who sits in the easy chair, and whose duty it is to let people in and out. In all probability he will be asleep."

"Then we should have a good chance of passing him unperceived?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then the front door be it! What do you say, Jack?"

"The front door, by all means!"

"Come, then, at once—there is no time to lose!"

"I am loth to go," said Jack, "without first punishing those two wretches yonder."

"Leave them," replied Blueskin—"leave them; they are utterly unworthy of your resentment."

"I am unwilling."

"Nay, nay! By lingering we may bring upon ourselves great danger. Take good advice. Follow this young girl, who will lead the way."

"Yes, yes—oh, yes!"

"Come!"

Blueskin grasped Jack's arm as he spoke, and led him after the girl, who had already crossed the apartment.

She went direct to the door of the bedchamber through which our two friends had come.

Crossing this, she emerged on to the landing.

Here the little party paused to listen.

No sound, either from above or below, however, saluted their ears.

The stillness of the very grave reigned in the house.

Before leaving the room in which this singular scene had taken place, they were careful to ascertain that their prisoners were perfectly secure.

They then closed all the doors, so as to preclude the possibility of any sound they might make being able to reach to any great distance.

Encouraged by the silence, the trio now ventured to commence the descent of the stairs.

The staircase was a broad and ample one, and was most beautifully carpeted, so that it was the easiest matter in the world for them to descend without making a sound.

At convenient distances lamps were placed in niches, and these lighted up the whole of the place.

This was at once an advantage and a disadvantage.

The landing below was reached in safety and silence, and here they again paused to listen.

The stillness was unbroken.

Suddenly one of the doors close behind them was opened.

An ejaculation fell upon their ears, and the door closed again before either of our friends had time to turn round and look.

"Quick!" said the girl. "Descend at once!"

"Who was it?"

"I know not; perhaps someone who was about to emerge, and who then drew back upon seeing us. I do not think there is much ground for apprehension if we are speedy."

"Come on, then!"

Again the descent was commenced, and almost immediately afterwards a turn in the staircase disclosed the hall below.

At some distance was the front door, and near it a huge, easy chair, in which they had been led to suppose the porter would be sitting.

A second glance convinced them of the correctness of this information, for the legs of that individual could be seen, all the rest of his body being hidden in the profundities of the stuffed leather chair.

Whether he was asleep or awake was a question that had yet to be solved.

CHAPTER CCOXLL

EXPLAINS TO THE READER THE CAUSE OF THE SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE OF THE POLICE OFFICERS.

At any rate, at present he appeared to be unconscious of their presence, for he made no movement whatever.

The critical moment had now arrived; but, from the general aspect of affairs, they anticipated but little difficulty in being able to leave the house.

Those anticipations were, however, doomed not to be realised.

Jack was exceedingly confident.

"I will go first," he said, in a faint whisper; "you remain where you are for a moment."

"What are you about to do?"

"I will steal silently up to the old porter, and thrust the muzzle of a pistol into his ear, commanding him, on pain of having his brains blown out, to open the door!"

"Go on," said Blueskin; "that will do!"

"You wait here, then."

"All right!"

Upon receiving this assurance, Jack crept slowly, but noiselessly, down the staircase.

The hall was covered with some soft, carpety substance, so he was able to stride over it without making sound enough to disturb anyone.

The amount of stealth and caution made use of may have been greater than necessary, but if so, it was a mistake made on the right side.

At length Jack stood within arm's-length of the huge leather chair.

As yet there were no indications of his approach having been noted.

The porter did not move, and by his deep and stertorous breathing, which was now plainly to be heard, Jack concluded he slept.

One step more, and he stood before him.

The light of a lamp near the door streaming full upon the porter's countenance confirmed this supposition.

He was sound asleep.

This changed the current of Jack's intentions.

Seeing his condition, he doubted not that they should all be able to leave the house without attracting his observation.

He resolved, at any rate, to make the attempt, and turned towards the front door.

That he should be able to remove the fastenings readily, he did not for a moment doubt.

Scarcely, however, had his hand touched the knob than the porter awoke.

He uttered an exclamation, and, springing from his seat, seized Jack in a moment.

But Sheppard saw him coming, and was by no means taken by surprise.

He grappled him by the throat, which he compressed so forcibly as to make further speech impossible.

Then, thrusting the muzzle of the pistol into his ear, as he had at first intended to do, he cried, in a low, hoarse, guttural voice:

"Silence—silence, for your life! Open the door, and allow us to depart, or, as sure as this is a pistol, I will blow your brains out!"

The porter's countenance changed when this ferocious speech fell upon his ears, and he nodded his head violently, as though to intimate that he would allow them to pass out.

All this Blueskin had seen from the distance, and he now hastened to the door, accompanied by the girl, whose delight at the apparently near prospect of freedom knew no bounds.

Just, however, when Blueskin reached Jack's side, a sudden uproar took place without.

In the street, the trampling of many feet and the hum of voices came plainly to their ears.

What this portended they could not guess, and they remained motionless and aghast, looking in each other's faces for some explanation of the uproar.

It was in vain.

Before they had time to recover from their amazement, the trampling feet paused outside the door, upon which a shower of heavy blows was immediately rained.

Every one seemed to strike upon our friends' hearts, and render them incapable of motion.

"Open, open!" cried a loud voice; "in the name of the King, I call upon you to open the door!"

The porter trembled.

He was no less terrified and astonished than our two friends.

Finding no notice was taken of their command, another violent succession of blows were rained upon the door, before one of which it gave way.

This fact was, the door, for convenience in opening and closing, was only fastened with a spring latch, the strength of which was quite inadequate to support the door should an attack be made upon it.

Jack, bewildered by the sudden and unexpected nature of this assault, released his hold upon the porter, and retreated in the direction of the staircase.

He was rapidly followed by Blueskin and the young girl.

A glance showed them that the attack had been made by a large body of police officers.

Not Wild's myrmidons, be it understood, but genuine Bow Street Runners.

What could be their errand in that place it would be hard to say, though naturally enough Blueskin and Jack connected their sudden appearance with themselves.

In this they were in error.

This attack by the police upon the mysterious house in Spring Gardens had nothing to do with our two friends, who happened most unluckily to be there at that particular time.

The officers never dreamt that they should find Jack Sheppard there, whose capture they had almost begun to despair of effecting, and for whose apprehension such a very large reward was offered.

The explanation of their sudden appearance is simple in the extreme, and we at once hasten to place it before the reader.

It will be remembered, in the conversation which Blueskin and Jack Sheppard overheard between Mother Robotham and her no less infamous associate, allusion was made to a certain young sea officer, who had been lured into that house.

He had been brought by a person whose especial duty it was to creep about London streets in search of victims.

This sea officer was a lieutenant on board a man-of-war which had just come into port, and he in common with many more had come up to London to spend the money which they had just received.

Sailor-like, he fell an easy prey to the person by whom he was accosted and led to the house in Spring Gardens.

By this time he had drunk sufficient to render his brain clouded, though he was far from being intoxicated.

His full pockets and his state did not escape the keen eyes of Mother Robotham.

Her resolve was immediately taken.

He was introduced to the girl who was about to be chastised, and a quantity of drugged liquor placed before him.

Had he partaken of this, he would have become helpless and unconscious.

His pockets would then have been rifled, and every valuable article he carried would have been taken.

Then, still in the same state, he would have been carried to some distant quarter of the metropolis, laid down in the street, or propped up against a door-step.

It was in this way that very many persons had been served.

In fact, it was quite a common thing with Mother Robotham, and no inconsiderable quantity of her revenue was acquired by this means.

Hitherto she had escaped conviction, but not suspicion.

Persons who had been served in this manner, waking up and discovering themselves in the street, would not wonder at finding their pockets empty, and, generally speaking, their intellects were in too confused a condition for them to be able to recollect with certainty the house to which they had been taken.

In fact, it was part of the duty of the decoy by whom they were lured to destruction to ply them with drink on the way, and so occupy their attention as to make them forget altogether to notice whither they were led.

It was thus that Mother Robotham committed her infamous deeds with impunity.

But the end had now arrived.

At all risks, the young girl who was introduced determined to warn the next victim of his fate.

That next victim was the young officer.

She told him of his danger—informed him that the wine was drugged—that he would be plundered—perhaps murdered.

This startling communication had the effect of sobering him, though his brain was still in a state of terrible confusion, rendering him incapable of acting or thinking as he otherwise would have done.

The conversation that had just taken place had been overheard.

On the other side of the door with her ear against the keyhole, was Mother Robotham.

Boiling over with rage, she called aloud for help, and sprang into the room.

She seized the young officer in her grasp, and doubtless, could she but have retained him until assistance arrived, he would never have been permitted to leave the house alive.

The possessor of such secrets would be ruthlessly murdered in cold blood.

The young officer, however, was quite sober enough to struggle with his assailant.

Not without difficulty he shook her off, and then, having done so, he discovered that fresh foes were in the doorway.

He cast his eyes around.

He had but one idea, and that was to escape.

Before him was a window.

Quite heedless as to where it led, he made a sudden rush and sprang through it.

There was a terrific crash, and the next moment he felt himself come into violent contact with the ground.

But the consciousness that his life was in danger was vividly before his mind, and prevented him from relapsing into insensibility.

Up he sprang.

A glance showed him he was in the street, and no sooner was he aware of this, than he set off at full speed, without taking the least notice of the direction in which he was hurrying.

At length, as his brain cooled and his physical powers failed him, he halted, and then discovered that he was not pursued.

Reflection now came properly back to his mind.

Clasping his hands over his temples, he leant against a doorway and strove to think clearly of the occurrences of the past.

For a time he could not recollect how he came into that house, or where it was situated.

By degrees, however, he remembered the man by whom he had been decoyed, and then he recollected entering a public-house at Charing Cross, almost immediately after which he entered the house.

It was not until this moment that the thoughts of the lieutenant reverted to the young girl to whom alone he was indebted for his escape from the awful den.

For the first time he became aware that their conversation had been overheard.

He shuddered.

That the young girl would suffer some horrible punishment at the hands of the fiends who inhabited the place, he felt convinced.

The danger of returning would be great indeed, and yet his gratitude would not permit him to allow her to remain at the mercy of such people as she would have to deal with.

What to do for the best he scarcely knew.

He had passed nearly the whole of his life on the ocean, and knew but little how affairs were managed on land.

He felt the want of advice, and came to the resolution of taking into his confidence the first person he met.

But the hour was a lonely one, and the streets were deserted.

A light in the distance, however, attracted his attention, and he made his way towards it.

The light came from the windows of a public-house.

Here he determined to enter.

At the bar several persons were standing.

He called for cold rum-and-water, and desired to speak to the landlord.

To this individual he related everything.

The landlord coupled this narrative in a moment with

the mysterious robberies that had of late been so frequent, one of which had happened only a day or so ago, and the victim was discovered within a few yards of the house.

It so happened that among the persons who stood at the bar was a Bow Street Runner, as the police officers were then called.

To him the communication was next made.

This officer, scenting something unusual, at once took charge of the young sailor, and calling a hackney-coach, ordered the jarvey to drive them direct to Bow Street.

On their arrival at the head police station, the inspector was made acquainted with the strange story, as well as with the surmises of the landlord of the public-house.

The inspector of course did not hesitate as to what should be done.

A number of the men were called up and got in readiness, and the little party set off in the direction of Charing Cross.

Upon arriving here, the officer pointed out the public-house into which he had been taken, though it was now closed.

The difficult part of the business now remained.

Would he be able to find the house or not?

The sailor thought deeply, and called back to his mind every little circumstance that had occurred.

Then, placing his back against the door of the public-house, as though he had just come out of it, he crossed over the wide open space in the direction of Spring Gardens.

Here he paused irresolutely, and then went on until at length he paused before No. 57.

The officers all looked up at the house, and several recognised it as the den kept by Mother Robotham.

The suspicions which had been previously entertained respecting her were revived with redoubled force, and at length, confident that they were right, and that they were about to make some startling discoveries, the officers rushed into the house in the manner we have recorded.

CHAPTER CCCLII.

JACK SHEPPARD IS CAPTURED BY THE POLICE, AND BLUESKIN IS HOTLY PURSUED THROUGH THE EMPTY HOUSE.

SUCH, then, was the simple enough explanation of the apparently mysterious and unaccountable appearance of the police officers at the house in Spring Gardens.

It is surprising how great a difference a few moments will sometimes make.

Had the officers arrived a little later, or had our friends been a little earlier, this very disastrous rencontre would have been avoided.

But fate had ordained it otherwise.

The officer in command had issued instructions to his subordinates to take into custody every person, male or female, that they found within the house, so as to preclude the possibility of allowing one of the guilty parties to slip through their fingers.

The first person seized was the porter.

Despite his struggles, he was securely handcuffed, and left in charge of two of the force.

The remainder having caught sight of the retreating figures of our friends, made a rush towards the stairs, and hastened up after them.

Finding it impossible to leave the house by the front door, Jack and Blueskin naturally bethought themselves of the trap-door, by means of which they had in the first instance gained admission.

Embarrassed as they now were with the young girl, the difficulty of leaving by this means was very much increased.

Still they did not doubt their capabilities to overcome a difficulty of this description.

Away, then, they went up the stairs, with such speed as only those could make who were similarly situated.

In less time than would be believed possible, the top of the house was reached.

But the officers were close behind them, and before it could be possible for them to pass through the trap-door, would stand where they now stood.

Some means must therefore be adopted of checking their advance, so as to give them the time necessary to make their escape.

Hastily Jack opened the door nearest to him.

A faint shriek came from within the chamber, showing that someone was disturbed.

In a stern voice, Blueskin bade them be silent.

Just inside the room was a large chest of drawers.

"This will do," cried Jack, "help me with it. We will roll it down the stairs, and I fancy that will be rather difficult to clamber over."

Blueskin did not reply in words, but showed that he fully approved of Jack's suggestion by putting his shoulder against the chest of drawers and commencing to push it towards the head of the stairs.

In this he was seconded by Jack, and the young girl, too, exerted all the strength which she possessed to the same end.

The brief delay that had taken place in making the watchman prisoner had enabled our friends to get a good start of their foes.

Now, however, they could hear them trampling up the staircase, and it seemed doubtful, after all the trouble they had taken, whether they would be in time to achieve their object.

The proximity of the officers endowed Jack and Blueskin with an amount of strength which was surprising even to themselves.

Swiftly the huge chest of drawers was pushed across the landing.

But when the top of the stairs was reached, the police officers were already visible below.

Another minute, and they would be too late.

Exerting all their strength, however, they pushed the heavy piece of furniture over.

With a crash that seemed to shake the house to its foundations, the chest of drawers plunged down the stairs.

The police officers both heard and saw it coming, and drew back.

The action was an involuntary one.

The chest of drawers did not fall far.

It wedged itself into the first angle of the stairs, and there remained.

Apparently, it was so firmly fixed in its present position that it would be impossible to move it, except from above, and by means of instruments especially adapted for the purpose.

This was enough to fill our friends with exultation, and with reanimated hopes of succeeding in effecting their escape, they turned to the trap-door.

It was just possible that the officers would be able to climb over the obstacle thus unexpectedly thrown before them, but it would be the work of time.

This vigorous proceeding to cover their retreat suggested to the officers that they were on the track of some very desperate persons, for as yet, be it understood, they had no idea that it was Jack Sheppard and the notorious Blueskin who were before them.

Had they possessed such knowledge, their pursuit would probably have been more energetic than it was.

Just, however, as the chest of drawers was rolled down, the foremost of the police caught sight of their antagonists.

They recognised them immediately, and announced that fact by giving utterance to a loud shout.

Indeed, it is certain that at this time there was not a member of the force who was not well acquainted with their personal appearance, for innumerable bills had been circulated both by the Government and Jonathan Wild, in which they were most minutely described.

Despite, therefore, their late change of habiliments, they recognised them at the first glance.

Our friends heard the shout, and came to a tolerably correct conclusion as to the cause of it.

Still they did not permit it to unnervé them.

Apparently with as much coolness as ever, Jack said:

"We shall do it now, Blueskin, if we are careful! Be quick! You are the tallest! Spring up to the trap-door, and I will hand the girl up to you!"

There was no time to argue about what should be done, and Blueskin at once sprang up to the trap-door as his companion had desired.

He managed to grasp the edge with his fingers, but quickly tightening his hold, he lightly and rapidly drew himself up.

No sooner did he feel himself on the rafters, than, lying

down on his face, he held his arms in readiness to take hold of the young girl.

In the meantime, Jack Sheppard seized her by the waist and succeeded in lifting her high enough for Blueskin to take hold of her.

Our old friend seized her in a moment, and, not without some difficulty, drew her up into the space between the tiles and the ceiling.

"I am coming," said Jack. "Never you mind me, but leave me to take care of myself. Get the girl out on to the roof!"

Blueskin obeyed.

He was in the act of placing her on the outside, when a pistol-shot and a great tumult warned him that something serious was taking place below.

In a moment he looked down, and nearly lost his life by so doing.

No sooner did he appear, than something whistled past his head, and a bright flash and a report simultaneously occurring, told him that a pistol had been discharged in his face.

By the narrowest chance in the world, he escaped receiving any injury.

But the sight below was one for which he was totally unprepared, and he could scarcely believe that so much had taken place in such a short space of time.

He had scarcely left the trap-door a moment, and now, when he looked down, the landing was swarming with officers, and Jack was struggling desperately in the grasp of several, but hopelessly a prisoner.

This is what had happened.

Jack's attention had been so centred in handing up the girl to Blueskin, and preparing to spring up to the trap-door himself, that he did not notice the progress the officers were making.

They had, however, succeeded in climbing over the barrier, which at first seemed insurmountable; and Jack Sheppard did not see that they had done this until it was too late.

He made a wild spring upwards, and succeeded in catching hold of the edge of the opening.

Fearful that he would make his escape, and as they had instructions to take him alive or dead, one of the officers drew a pistol and fired at him.

He took aim at his head, but a sudden movement which Jack made at the moment saved him, and the bullet struck the fleshy part of his arm instead.

The effect of this was to deprive him of all use in the limb, and he dropped to the floor with an irrepressible cry of agony upon his lips.

Ere he could recover himself, the officers were upon him.

As soon as he felt himself seized, he struggled desperately but vainly with his captors.

The grasp they kept upon him was too tight a one to be shaken off.

But still he struggled, though all he did was to uselessly exhaust his worn strength, for the number of officers kept increasing every moment.

Another of their number, looking up, perceived Blueskin at the opening in the ceiling above, and, doubtless encouraged by the success which had followed the firing of a pistol just before, drew another from his belt, and aimed it at the face which he could only just distinguish.

His shot failed altogether.

The bullet flew high in the air over the house-tops, and fell down again without inflicting the least injury upon anyone.

And now, in spite of his struggles to prevent it, a pair of handcuffs were slipped over Jack's wrists.

As soon as he saw this, and the number of police officers surrounding him, the vague idea which had for a moment filled Blueskin's mind, of jumping down and rescuing him, was quite banished, and he found it would require the exercise of all his energies to escape himself.

He had two alternatives before him, and he did not hesitate a moment as to which he should adopt.

One was, to remain where he was, and be captured along with his comrade; and the other was, to try his best to escape, and leave him to deal with his enemies as best he might.

The latter may sound very much like desertion, but yet it was the course which Blueskin adopted, and no one

could ever accuse him of the cowardly action of deserting his companion in the hour of danger.

But Blueskin was well aware that while he was at liberty he should be in a position to render assistance to his friend in captivity.

Should both, however, be made prisoners, it would be utterly impossible for one to be the least assistance to the other.

Besides, he had faith in Jack's own power to outwit his foes.

He had done such a thing before, and doubtless would be able to do so again.

At any rate, as he could do no good by remaining, or attempting the rescue of Jack, Blueskin made his way out on to the roof.

He was compelled to be speedy in his movements, for the officers were preparing to pursue him.

To get on to the roof, and reach the spot where he had left the young girl, did not take Blueskin a moment, and having done so, he said:

"Quick—quick! For my sake be quick! You have nothing to fear from the officers, but I have; and unless I am speedy I shall be captured. I cannot leave you here, but as soon as we reach a place of greater safety we will separate."

"No, no!" said the girl; "leave me here: I am not afraid. The officers will not harm me; and perhaps I shall be able to detain them for a moment, and so give you an additional chance of escape, whereas I feel that if I remain with you I shall be so great a clog upon all your movements, that you will certainly be captured."

The young girl spoke with energy and rapidity. Blueskin did not hesitate to avail himself of her offer.

He knew that while she remained there she would incur no danger whatever.

The police-officers would have no charge to make against her; and, as she had said, she should be able to detain his enemies for a moment.

Hurriedly thanking her for her offer, Blueskin crept over the tiles with as much speed as was consonant with safety.

The officers were, however, alarmingly close behind him. Already they had emerged on to the roof.

Luckily, the distance to the trap-door was but trifling; and, as it seemed instinctively, Blueskin made his way towards this.

With a recklessness of personal consequences which under no other circumstances he would have exhibited, he lowered himself through the trap-door.

He reached the floor beneath with a rather violent shock; and he limped for a little while afterwards, having slightly sprained his ankle.

About such a trivial misfortune as this he had no time to linger, and with breakneck speed he descended the stairs.

Upon reaching the first floor he paused.

Then opening a door close at hand, he entered a room in the front of the house.

Cautiously approaching the window, he looked out.

As he had expected, he had a tolerably good view of the street beneath.

To his mortification, he discovered it was filled with people.

His original intention had been to make his way to the front door and pass out of it.

The crowded state of the street now rendered it impracticable, for, if he emerged, his detection would be certain.

Some other means must be found, and that, too, without delay.

Turning away from the window, he once more made his way to the landing.

Just as he reached it, a tremendous lumbering sound, which clearly came from above, struck upon his ears.

"It is the officers!" said Blueskin. "Already they have tracked me thus far."

CHAPTER CCCXLIII.

RELATES WHAT HAPPENED TO EDGORTH BESS AFTER HER FRANTIC LEAP INTO THE THAMES.

It is now time that we returned to Edgworth Bess.

It is true that to do so we leave, for a short time, Jack Sheppard and Blueskin in a situation of great peril, yet

the condition of the poor heiress is scarcely less desperate.

It will be recollected that when we saw her last, was when, after having fled wildly and madly from Mrs. Pike's the shroud-maker, she had reached the banks of the river Thames.

Unquestionably the fire of insanity was burning in her brain when she arrived at the spot.

She was only dimly conscious of what she was about, and seemed to be urged towards the darkly flowing water by some evil spirit.

As the waves plashed against the barges that were moored upon the banks or against the walls of the wharves, they seemed to say: "Rest—rest—rest!" and the foamy tips of the waves as they receded from the shore seemed to beckon her towards them.

Thoroughly heartsick and weary of the scenes which she had just passed through, she resolved to plunge into the cold, dark water.

She was led to do so by some indefinable instinct, which she could not resist.

She was no longer mistress of her own actions.

We have stated how she sprang with maniac-like agility on to one of the barges that were moored close at hand, and how, on reaching the prow of the clumsy vessel, she had uttered a wild, shrieking laugh, and plunged into the Thames.

As she sped over the boat, she felt that she trod upon some soft substance, but what it was she did not trouble herself to ascertain.

Nor did she heed the rough ejaculations which fell upon her ears.

The soft substance upon which she had trod was the body of a man.

It was from his lips that the ejaculations had come.

His duty was to remain on board the barge all night as watchman, in order to guard its cargo from the depredations of the Thames pirates.

He was asleep when Edgworth Bess scrambled aboard the barge, and was awakened by her foot pressing upon him.

He started up in rather a confused manner, and caught sight of some indistinct object flitting across the barge in the direction of the prow.

Hastily rising to his feet, he scrambled after it, and then perceived the indistinct figure was a woman.

Her horrible, shrieking, maniacal laugh struck upon his ears; and then, in a moment, he comprehended all.

It was not the first time he had seen girls commit suicide by plunging into the river.

As soon as he was conscious of her intent, he blundered forward with still greater speed, and stretched out his hand to take hold of her clothing.

But he was one second too late.

Ere he could grasp it the leap had been taken.

She was gone.

She disappeared from his view in an instant, for the surface of the river was covered with a kind of mist, while from the sky a quantity of sleet—half hail, half snow—poured down, rendering it an impossibility to see anything at a distance.

The loud splash which followed the frenzied leap, however, echoed far and wide.

It was this splash and the icy coldness of the water that restored Edgworth Bess to a proper frame of mind.

A wild, thrilling scream came from her lips when she found herself struggling with the waves, and the instinct of self-preservation rose paramount in her breast.

Her intellects were still in confusion.

She was like one in a dream, and was wholly at a loss to account for her presence in the river.

The cold water numbed her, and deprived her of the power of motion.

Her struggles ceased.

She wished to swim to the shore, but could not.

The water hissed and gurgled in her ears.

It foamed and surged over her face as her body was tossed about at the caprice of the waves.

She opened her lips to shriek again, but the water rushed in and choked her.

In vain she tried to prevent it.

Her senses forsook her.

By degrees she became insensible to everything.

Her last consciousness was that something was humming and buzzing in her ears.

After that, all was over.

What happened afterwards was a blank.

We return now to the man in the barge, who had witnessed the poor girl's frantic leap.

This event had thoroughly awakened him, and he proved it by his actions.

Hastening to the after-part of the boat, he shouted out to someone who appeared to be below.

He was answered gruffly, and the next moment a man as rough looking as himself appeared.

"There's a gal overboard!" he said. "Come on! Let's help the poor thing! I daresay she has repented by this time, and wishes herself on the land again. There's a wherry alongside, and we can push off in a jiffy."

The man thus addressed muttered something in a grumbling, indistinct tone of voice, but did not disobey.

He stooped down, however, and produced a long pole, tipped with iron, which is called a boat-hook, and is an indispensable instrument in navigating the river.

In the meantime, his companion had lowered himself into the wherry, which, as he had stated, lay alongside.

He unshipped the oars in an instant, and cast off the moment he was joined by his companion.

He had noted the spot where the girl had plunged in, and immediately rowed towards it.

But nothing of her could be seen.

The falling snow and sleet were baffling to a degree, and they strained their eyes in vain to catch a glimpse of her.

But the surface of the water was uniformly dark, and they were about to return without having achieved their object, when the one with the oars perceived some floating object near them.

It was approaching, and he called out to his companion to keep a sharp look-out.

The man stood up in the boat with his pole in readiness.

His eyes were fixed on the floating something which one more wave would bring within his reach.

It was a human face, and the instant he made this discovery he stuck his boat-hook into the mass of apparel that was floating on the surface of the water.

The instrument took firm hold, and by slow degrees he dragged the inanimate body towards the boat.

The man with the oars looked round, and, seeing that it was a girl, concluded in a moment that it was the one he had seen leap into the river.

The man with the hook now found his task grow difficult, for the body showed a strong inclination to sink.

Without the skill which long practice had given him, he would never have succeeded in lifting her into the boat.

But he accomplished this feat, and no sooner had he done so than his companion rowed with all speed towards the shore.

The other occupied himself in chafing the poor girl's hands, and attempting to instil some life into her.

But he had no encouragement to persevere with his attentions.

Edgworth Bess presented the appearance of a dead body.

Not a particle of life was visible, and her body was as cold as the water from which it had just been taken.

Nevertheless, the man continued his efforts, for, from the nature of his profession, he naturally understood how to treat drowning persons.

The keel of the little wherry grated against the shore without his having been able to extract one symptom of returning life, and he shook his head gloomily in reply to his companion's remark, as he lifted the poor girl out of the boat.

"I am afraid there is no life in her," he said. "However, whether there is or not, we will carry her to the Prince of Wales inn, on the bank yonder."

"All right, mate!" was the reply. "Just wait a moment while I moor the boat, and I'll be with you."

"Come on, then!"

The man was not a moment mooring the boat, and then he hurried off after his companion, who carried Edgworth Bess in his arms as though she had been no heavier than a feather.

The Prince of Wales was the sign of an inn situated very close to the river's edge, which, for the most part, was

frequented by boatmen and others employed on the water.

The light that came from the window in the tap-room was dimly visible in the distance, and the two men directed their steps in a straight line towards it.

In a few moments they arrived.

The hour was past midnight, but the front door of the public-house was wide open, and so it would remain until just before daybreak.

Rude sounds of boisterous merriment struck upon the ears of the two men as they entered the inn, but Edgworth Bess heard them not.

She was dead to every outward sensation.

The landlady of the house immediately came forward. She was known to the two men, and they at once addressed her.

But when she saw what they carried, a cloud of displeasure came over her face.

To her there was something exceedingly unpleasant in the idea of having a dead body brought into her house.

She was well aware that she could not refuse to allow it to remain, but this knowledge only increased her ill-temper.

She foresaw the inquest, and the probably disagreeable notoriety which her house would obtain.

It was her wish to keep it as quiet as possible, for many of her customers came there merely because the situation was quiet, and because there was little likelihood of their being disturbed.

There was no help for it; but in a surly tone of voice she chid the men for having brought the body there.

"Can't help it, mum!" said the one who had manifested such a desire to rescue the poor girl from the river. "Can't help it, mum! Your house is the nearest, and, bless the poor thing's heart, I don't believe she's dead at all, for she wasn't in the water long enough to drown! Show my mate a place where he can put her down, and I'll run for a surgeon!"

The kind-hearted boatman, knowing that the landlady could not refuse, did not wait to see his instructions carried out, but hastened off for a surgeon.

Being well acquainted with the neighbourhood, he readily found one.

When he re-entered the inn, accompanied by the medical man, he found that the body had been laid upon a table, not far from the fire.

A crowd of eager, curious people were in the room, clustering round the table.

The surgeon frowned as he saw this, and peremptorily commanded everyone to quit the apartment, with the exception of the landlady.

He was reluctantly obeyed.

One by one the idlers left, and then the doctor, securing the door, went up to the table.

The ragged and miserable habiliments of Edgworth Bess were dragged with water, which, too, had drained off them until the table was covered with moisture, which, drop by drop, trickled on to the floor.

Her eyes were closed, and her features, which were before pinched and pallid, wore now so close a resemblance to death, that even the surgeon, skilful as he was in such matters, hesitated to say whether she was indeed alive.

Various restoratives were administered, but without avail.

Her body was icy cold, and every limb rigid.

Under these circumstances, still greater efforts were made for her revivification.

The surgeon was unremitting in his attentions.

He was a hard, matter-of-fact man, and what little sympathies he might have originally possessed had been blunted by his profession.

But they were not wholly destroyed, for when he gazed upon the pallid countenance of Edgworth Bess, a feeling of interest was awakened in his bosom for which he was totally at a loss to account.

It was well that the poor heiress should have enlisted the kindly sympathies of one so powerful as the doctor.

At length his patient efforts to restore her to life were rewarded.

Gradually her pulse fluttered and her heart resumed its proper functions.

She was then instantly carried to a bed, and it was here that Edgworth Bess first recovered her consciousness of what was taking place around her.

An opiate was then administered, and the poor girl fell off into a deep and refreshing sleep.

The landlady was scarcely less pleased to have Edgworth Bess an inmate of her house alive than she had previously been to have her dead body.

The doctor, however, acted as a kind of check upon her uncharitableness.

It was not long after he had taken his departure, and just as the public-house was going to be closed, that a dark figure crept towards the inn, and, after pausing a moment at the front door, entered.

He was a short, thick-set, muscular-looking man, and held his head on one side in a very peculiar manner.

He strode along the passage towards the bar of the inn with the firm, decided step of one who feels that he has a right to command, and that he possesses the power of bending others to his will.

His dress was plain and ordinary in appearance, but composed of the richest of materials, while jewels sparkled in different parts of it.

A dozen strides took him to the little bar window.

The landlady was not within, and the man knocked sharply upon the counter with a short, heavy stick that he took from his coat pocket.

It was a formidable-looking budgeon, and a heavy blow could have been delivered with it, making it a weapon of terrible efficacy in a combat at close quarters.

The glasses jingled as the sharp knocks were delivered upon the counter, and the next moment the landlady appeared.

Her countenance was convulsed with anger, and the moment she caught sight of her customer, she poured forth a torrent of abuse.

CHAPTER CCCXLIV.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES AN ARRANGEMENT WITH THE LANDLADY OF THE PRINCE OF WALES INN.

THE short, thick-set man who stood at the bar allowed her to go on without making the least attempt to stem the current of her eloquence; but when, at length, the landlady ceased, from pure inability to say any more, he slowly raised his hat, and made an ironical kind of bow.

We have said that day was breaking.

Already the first flush of dawn had crept over all things.

The bar shutters were closed, but through the diamond-shaped holes that were cut in them there streamed two grey, sickly beams of light.

One of these ghastly beams fell full upon the countenance of the man as he raised his hat and bowed.

It revealed the hideous features with great distinctness.

The landlady uttered a scream of dismay, and the whole expression of her countenance changed.

She seemed ready to sink upon the floor with fright.

Then the man knew that he had been recognised, and, with his countenance contorted by a grin of satisfaction, he replaced his hat upon his head.

From what has been just said, the reader will doubtless recognise this early customer at the Prince of Wales inn.

It was Jonathan Wild.

The landlady knew him.

She had seen him many a time, and now her guilty conscience made her tremble as it accused her of numberless actions, any one of which coming under the dreaded thief-taker's notice would suffice for her destruction.

We have lost sight of Jonathan Wild for some time lately.

The last time when we presented him to the reader was, when he dashed down the street in pursuit of Jack Sheppard and Blueskin, who, just at that moment, were safely in the tailor's shop.

He was now on a false scent, and though he spent several hours in searching closely, he was unable to see anything of his prisoners.

At last, weary and dispirited, he had returned to his own home, where he was compelled to refresh himself with a little rest and sleep.

Upon awaking, he was informed of the desperate condition of his son, who had been much injured by his fall down the stairs.

This increased the ill-humour under which he was suffering.

He was deprived of a coadjutor who had proved himself of great sagacity and ability, at the very moment when he had most need of his services.

He made his way to his son's chamber, and found him in bed, groaning dismally.

There was the bullet-wound he had received from Jack Sheppard's pistol, and the bruises and shakes he had received when his father and the man fell down upon him and hurled him backwards.

So severe were the hurts he had thus sustained that he had been carried home in an insensible state, and now that he was laid in bed he found himself wholly deprived of the power to rise.

It was with difficulty that he moved any of his limbs.

As soon as he saw his father, a volley of curses came from his lips.

"D—n it!" he cried, "what did you want to fall upon me like that for?"

He thus threw the whole of the blame upon the thief-taker.

Jonathan himself, who had not escaped without several severe contusions and wounds, was in no very amiable mood, and a tempest of passion was at once raised between them.

In the end, Jonathan left the chamber more furious than when he had entered it.

The continual defeats which he had met with had produced a great effect upon his mind.

He found himself unable to attend to his ordinary duties, though numerous important affairs were pressing for immediate attention.

But Wild felt that he could do nothing until he had achieved his so frequently baffled purpose.

He had noticed that Blueskin and Jack were separated from Edgworth Bess, and he was in hopes that this would somehow turn out to his advantage.

Where she could be he could not imagine, but this he trusted his emissaries would ere long discover.

But even for this he could not wait in patience, but sallied forth himself.

He had nothing but his trouble for his pains.

Each day he returned home without having met with the least success.

Nor had his men been any more fortunate.

The precautions taken by Jack and Blueskin effectually baffled them.

Then as for Edgworth Bess, the reader will please to understand that during this period she was an inmate of Mother Robotham's house, and extended helplessly on a sick bed.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if he failed to find her.

As day after day passed, Jonathan's uneasiness and anger rapidly increased, and at length, to such an extent did his rage carry him that not one of his men dared approach him.

His son George did not mend very rapidly, and it required nearly the whole of Mr. Snocall's time to wait upon him.

There was some satisfaction in knowing that he was gradually getting better, and this was the only satisfaction Jonathan Wild was able to obtain.

A paltry one for him.

As time passed on without receiving any tidings, a dread took possession of his mind, which he in vain tried to banish.

It was, that the three fugitives had found some means of leaving the kingdom.

He knew this was almost an impossibility without the fact coming to his knowledge, for he had spies everywhere.

No tidings of this description had reached his ear, and yet he could not drive away the torturing thought that they had found some means of slipping off unperceived.

This drove him almost frantic, but nevertheless he did not remit any of his exertions, and urged his spies on by every means he could think of.

In this manner time passed on, until at length the time came when Edgworth Bess quitted the shroud-maker's with so much precipitation.

While hurrying through the streets in a manner so well calculated to attract the attention of the other passengers, she was seen by one of Wild's gang.



JACK SHEPPARD IS RELEASED FROM THE BOX IN THE VESTIBULE OF NEWGATE.

He recognised her, from the description which had been furnished him, and pursued her.

But, all unconscious that anyone was on her track, the poor girl flew onwards, and by sheer speed outdistanced the man, who, to his deep chagrin, lost sight of her.

Once off his view, he knew he had but small chance of seeing her again while she continued to maintain her present rate of speed, and therefore he did the wisest thing in the world, and that was, to set off to Newgate Street, and communicate what intelligence he possessed to the thief-taker, who, meagre and scanty as it was, would doubtless accept of it gladly, and set all his resources at work.

Such a clue as the girl having been seen in one particular neighbourhood would be one that he would have very little difficulty in following up, and ere long he would doubtless make some further discoveries.

The man hastened along with all the speed he was able to make, but ere he had performed one-fourth of the distance which intervened between Westminster and Newgate Street, he was startled by a sudden command to stop,

No. 70

which was uttered by a voice familiar in the extreme to him.

He obeyed instantly and instinctively.

The voice which had pronounced the word "Halt!" was the voice of Jonathan Wild.

Restless and uneasy, he was once again roaming the streets, in the hope of picking up some information.

It was while thus engaged, and allowing nothing that took place around him to escape his notice, that he perceived this member of his band hurrying towards Newgate Street at a speed which seemed to indicate that he was the bearer of unusually important tidings.

It was in consequence of this that he called out to the man to stop.

At the same time he made his way towards him.

"Where are you going?" he asked, with undisguised anxiety and impatience. "Tell me at once what has happened!"

The man opened and shut his mouth, and gasped convulsively, but he was breathless, and no articulate sound

came from his lips, though he struggled hard to speak.

Jonathan, however, saw nothing of all this, and, in a more peremptory manner than before, called upon him to state what had happened.

At length the man managed to gasp out his information.

But when the thief-taker heard that he had lost sight of her after having once commenced the pursuit, he burst out into a furious rage.

He had ascertained, however, whereabouts she had vanished from his view, and leaving the discomfited janizary to recover his wind in the best manner he was able, he set off towards the place.

Upon arriving here, he commenced his inquiries, and almost the first thing he learned was that a girl had committed suicide a short time before by jumping into the river.

Though this was an act which he scarcely thought Edgworth Bess would perform, yet when he thought of the strange manner in which his man had described seeing her fly through the streets, he could not help thinking there was a disagreeable probability of it.

At any rate, he determined to learn whether the body of the girl had been recovered, and if so, to have a look at her in order to confirm or disperse his doubts.

With this intention he made his way towards the river-bank, but taking care to prosecute his inquiries on his way.

He elicited scarcely anything of importance, however.

Upon reaching the water, he looked about him for any signs of commotion.

Ere long he perceived a group of people at a short distance.

He made his way towards them without delay, and imperceptibly mingled in the throng.

Here he stood listening.

As he had hoped and anticipated, the subject of the conversation was the suicide of the young girl.

One man was relating to the rest the particulars of what had occurred.

It was the watchman who had been aroused by Edgworth Bess springing on to the boat.

Having deposited her in safety in the inn, he had refreshed himself with a stimulant, and returned to the boat, which having been left in his charge, he was responsible for the safety of all that it contained, so he did not dare leave it for any length of time.

Before Jonathan had stood among the group a moment, he heard that the body of the young girl had been taken to the Prince of Wales inn.

Upon receipt of this information, the thief-taker turned away.

Nothing more would be said that would interest him.

As he strode slowly away, he repeated over and over a great many times the name of the public-house.

At length he recollected it, and ere long his extraordinary memory furnished him with numerous particulars about the tenants of it.

The information he possessed would, he felt certain, enable him to exercise a certain power over them, should circumstances so fall out as to make it necessary for him to do so; and now with a more rapid step he directed his way to the public-house.

We have described how he entered it.

We have alluded, too, to the consternation exhibited by the landlady.

And now, having accounted for the presence of Jonathan Wild, which otherwise would have appeared not a little mysterious and remarkable, we will resume.

The alarm of the landlady, when she saw who it was stood at the bar, was great and unfeigned, and the thief-taker, as he perceived the impression and alteration which his recognition had produced, grinned hideously, and made another of his ironical bows.

"Don't faint, Mrs. Pickman, I beg!" he said. "Now pray don't! I am on the wrong side of the bar—I could not save you if you were to fall, indeed I couldn't!"

Mrs. Pickman, for such appeared to be the name of the landlady of the Prince of Wales, clutched the knob of a drawer to save herself from falling.

"Oh, Mr. Wild!" she said, "you have given me a turn, and no mistake! Oh, lawk, sir, I didn't know it was you! Excuse my being in such a flusteration; I cannot help it!"

"All right, Mrs. Pickman," he replied, with a frightful leer; "you have no occasion to be afraid!"

"Thank you, Mr. Wild! Do pray walk in! This way, if you please, my dear sir! I have not much to offer you in the shape of accommodation, for, as you see, it's rather a orkard time in the day!"

"Stop your gab!" said Wild, rudely cutting short her apologies. "Stop your gab! I've got something I want to talk about!"

"I know, Mr. Wild, but I am in such a flusteration now that I don't know what I am about!"

"Keep still, and listen to me! Shut the door!"

As he spoke, Jonathan Wild seated himself astride a chair, and leaning his arms on the back, rested his chin upon them.

In this attitude he prepared to commence his speech.

Mrs. Pickman had in the meantime closed the door.

But it was perfectly easy for anyone to see that she was in a terrible state of mental agitation, which the assurance to which Jonathan had given utterance very little abated.

Still, she had some of her wits about her, and, turning round immediately after having closed the door, she said:

"Before you begins to talk, Mr. Wild, be good enough to tell me what you would like to have to drink!"

"Bah! Nothing! Hold your jaw, I tell you! Why don't you listen to what I want to say?"

"I am a-listening, Mr. Wild, if you please! What do you want?"

"For you to be silent—I will do the talking!"

"Very good, sir; I'll be as dumb as a door-mat!"

"I suppose, then, Mrs. Pickman," said Jonathan Wild, suddenly changing the tone of his voice—"I suppose that you are well aware that I could hang you at Tyburn any day I liked?"

CHAPTER CCCXLV.

JONATHAN WILD RECOGNISES EDGWORTH BESS, AND COMES TO A PERFECT UNDERSTANDING WITH MRS. PICKMAN.

"The Lord be good to us!" said Mrs. Pickman, staggering back until she came to a chair, into which she sank with such force as to make all the glasses on the shelves in the bar jingle in such a manner that one would have thought they must have fallen off—"the Lord be good to us!"

"Amen!" said Jonathan Wild, with a hypocritical whine; "I hope he will."

"Oh, Mr. Wild, you have given me two such turns!"

"Shut up! I s'pose you know I can scrag you any day I like?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Wild!"

"You admit my power, then?"

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Wild," replied the landlady, "and I could not think of setting myself up in opposition to you."

"Very good," said the thief-taker—"very good! I have then really found a sensible woman. If you will just do what I require, you need not feel alarmed about my getting you into trouble."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Wild, you are the nicest man! Now, what can I get you to drink?"

"Since you are so kind," replied the thief-taker, "I don't mind if I do have something."

"Only say what you'll have, my dear sir, and you shall have it—that is, if I have got it in the house."

"Oh, thank you!" said Jonathan, with another hideous leer. "Have you got any brandy?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Wild, and some of the very best quality."

"Then bring me half a pint in a basin, and stir it up with a red-hot poker."

The landlady looked rather surprised at this order.

Nevertheless, she got up and drew the brandy, and then went out of the room for a basin and a red-hot poker.

During her absence, Jonathan rested his head on his arms, and gave himself up to deep and earnest thought.

He was arranging in his mind what he should do.

He was disturbed in his ruminations by the entrance of Mrs. Pickman, who had literally obeyed his orders, and carried in one hand an empty basin, and in the other a red-hot poker which she had just taken from the fire.

Very gravely, then, Wild poured the brandy out of the little pewter measure into the basin, and stirred it vigorously with the red-hot poker.

He then offered the truly fiery beverage to Mrs. Pickman, who, however, declined to partake of any of it.

Wild then quaffed it himself, and having returned the poker to the landlady, desired her once more to seat herself and listen to what he had to say.

"You think it will answer your purpose best, then, to keep in with me?" he said.

Mrs. Pickman nodded.

"So do I," replied Jonathan; "and, as I said a little while ago, if you will give me the information I require, you will have nothing to fear from me."

"What is it you want to know?"

"A girl has been brought here—"

"Yes, there has," interrupted Mrs. Pickman. "I think it's a shame my house should be a home for such hussies!"

"Home?" said Jonathan. "She is not dead, then?"

"Dead? Oh dear no, nothing of the sort!"

"Good!" said the thief-taker, gleefully rubbing his hands together. "Describe her to me—tell me what she looked like!"

Mrs. Pickman did so.

From the words she uttered, Jonathan became immediately convinced that he was on the right scent, and that the young girl brought in was really Edgworth Bess, though what could have occurred to prompt her to commit suicide he was quite at a loss to think.

He had other matters to attend to, however, and he reserved a consideration upon this point until another opportunity.

Eagerly Jonathan put the next question.

"Where is she now?" he said. "What has become of her?"

Mrs. Pickman, who, with a woman's penetration, saw in a moment that Jonathan was interested in this girl's fate, and that his presence there on that occasion was solely owing to her, replied at once:

"The doctor came to see her. She has recovered, and now she is upstairs in bed."

"Indeed! Can it really be so?"

Wild chuckled, and his eyes grew bright as he spoke.

After so many defeats and his late want of success, he could scarcely bring himself to believe in the reality of such good fortune.

"Oh yes, she's upstairs safe enough, never fear!"

"You must let me see her."

"You, Mr. Wild?"

"Yes, me!"

"But she is asleep!"

"So much the better; I would not have her see me for worlds. If she is asleep, take me up to her. One glance will convince me whether it is the girl of whom I am in search."

"I can't refuse you anything, Mr. Wild. Please to follow me."

Jonathan needed no second bidding.

On tiptoe he followed Mrs. Pickman up the stairs.

At length the landlady paused before the door of a bedroom.

"Wait a moment," she said, in a whisper. "Wait here, and I will go in and see whether she really sleeps."

"Do so—do so!" said Wild, as he stood aside and allowed her to pass him.

On tiptoe the landlady entered the bedchamber.

Just sufficient of the dim light of early day struggled in through the window to enable her to distinguish the various familiar objects in the room.

It was a rude bed upon which poor Edgworth Bess had been laid, and was by no means the best in the house.

There were no curtains to shield it from draught.

The four bare posts looked cheerless and poverty-stricken.

Cautiously Mrs. Pickman approached the bed.

The first glance that she cast upon it showed her that Edgworth Bess was still sleeping.

Turning round, she was about to retrace her steps to the door, when she saw that Jonathan had projected his hideous head into the apartment, and was looking earnestly towards her.

She beckoned for him to approach, and at the same time placed her finger on her lips to enjoin silence.

Jonathan's boots creaked ominously as he crept across the uncarpeted floor, but the noise made was not enough to have aroused the lightest sleeper.

In one more moment Jonathan gained the bedside.

The very first glance confirmed those hopes which he had been almost afraid to entertain.

It was indeed the poor heiress whom he so much desired to have in his own keeping who lay slumbering before him on the wretched bed.

He could not conceal his exultation and satisfaction from the piercing gaze of the landlady, who resolved, if possible, to turn it to her own advantage.

The thief-taker chuckled, and, clasping his hands behind his back, gazed long and earnestly upon the pinched and pallid features.

He did not give utterance to a single word, but his thoughts were nevertheless busy.

He could see directly that the state of Edgworth Bess was by far too critical to make it possible to remove her without incurring very great danger of her life.

This it was to his interest to preserve.

To leave her, however, where she was, would be attended with a certain amount of danger.

He had lost her so many times when he thought he had her safe, that he could not feel secure now without she was immediately under his eye.

And this seemed impossible.

His only hope lay in the landlady, and from the fact of her being so deeply in his power as she was, he thought he should be able to bind her over to his interest.

These cogitations occupied his mind for some moments while he stood gazing upon the girl's countenance, which, as the light grew stronger, he could see with greater distinctness.

He was warned of the impropriety of lingering longer by a slight movement.

He drew aside.

Mrs. Pickman trod softly in his steps.

The stairs were descended and the bar reached without the exchange of a single word.

Upon arriving here, they mechanically assumed their old positions.

Then Wild spoke.

"I want that girl upstairs taken particular care of," he said.

"I know that," rejoined Mrs. Pickman, with a satisfied nod.

Wild frowned.

He did not want this woman to know too much.

"I hope you'll bear in mind that I have the power to bring you to Tyburn if I think proper. I wish to keep that idea prominently before your mind in order that it may have a proper influence upon any arrangements we may come to with each other."

Mrs. Pickman shuddered and turned rather pale at this allusion to Tyburn.

It was by no means pleasant to her, and she saw that in all probability the only reward she would have for seeing Wild would be the negative one of being allowed to remain undisturbed in her malpractices.

The large reward in the shape of money which she hoped to be able to extract from the thief-taker dwindled away.

Jonathan Wild was by far too sharp for the landlady.

"I don't suppose you like it," he continued; "but it is, nevertheless, necessary for you to bear it in mind. I say, then, that I want that girl taken care of. I would not trouble you if I could help it, but I can see she is not in a fit state to be removed. Do you understand that, Mrs. Pickman?"

"I quite understand you, Mr. Wild."

"Very well, then. Mind this—I shall hold you responsible for the safe keeping of that girl!"

The words were pronounced with peculiar and indescribable emphasis.

"Me, Mr. Wild?" said Mrs. Pickman.

"Yes, you!" continued Jonathan; "and if she escapes, in any way whatever, woe be to you, for the very next Monday after that event takes place you will swing at Tyburn! I always keep my word in such matters, and should think no more of having you scragged, than I should of smoking a pipe!"

Mrs. Pickman shuddered in spite of the effort she made to appear unmoved.

She fully believed what Wild said, and had no doubt that, in this instance at least, he would keep his word.

"That's it, Mrs. Pickman. When I come to fetch her, if I find she is not here, your life will most assuredly pay

the forfeit, so I hope you will see the policy of looking sharp after her."

"Do—do you—think—that—that there is much fear of her getting away?"

"I don't know—I can only say she is a very slippery customer, and has got away even from me!"

A cold sweat burst out on the unhappy woman's face.

The thief-taker grinned derisively.

"So I would advise you to keep a sharp look-out after her, and don't let anybody go up into the room besides the doctor and yourself. As soon as ever she is well enough to be moved, you may depend upon my ridding you of the charge of her."

Mrs. Pickman sighed.

Most fervently did she wish that the poor girl was well enough to be removed at the present moment, for the prospect she had before her was anything but a pleasant one.

Her countenance afforded Jonathan a tolerable idea as to the state of her mind, and now, imagining that he had frightened her sufficiently, he thought that the proper time had arrived to offer her some inducement.

"You are quite sure you understand me, Mrs. Pickman?"

"Oh, quite!"

"And I hope you see the policy of looking very close after the girl, and see that no one spirits her away?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Very well, then. I have got something further to say, which may not sound so disagreeable."

Mrs. Pickman looked at him expectantly, but did not speak.

"If you take care of the girl, and I find her when I come here to fetch her," said Jonathan, slowly and emphatically, "I shall make you a present of a fifty-pound note for your trouble."

"Oh, Mr. Wild, you are too good!"

"Not a bit of it! When I come for the girl, if I find her here all right, I shall give you fifty pounds down; but, upon the other hand, if I come here and find her gone, I will hang you at Tyburn as surely as I now sit here upon this chair! There now! It will be no good for you to fly, for I would hunt the world over but what I would find you and carry out my intention!"

Mrs. Pickman was visibly impressed by these words, but the prospect of earning a fifty-pound note placed her somewhat at her ease.

"You may depend upon my looking sharp after her," she said; "and if she has managed to escape on former occasions, I think she will find the difficulty of getting the better of me!"

Jonathan was well enough pleased with this speech, and the resolute manner in which it was uttered.

"The fifty pounds," he said, "I intend to be clear reward. Look—here are ten guineas!"

Jonathan counted out the coin from his pocket as he spoke.

"These are for expenses," he continued, pushing them across the table towards her. "You will see that she has the best medical advice, and every attention paid to her. The sooner she gets well enough to be moved, the sooner you will have a serious responsibility off your hands, the sooner you will receive your fifty pounds, and the better I shall be pleased."

"Yes, Mr. Wild!"

"Above all, be careful and don't let anyone know a word about my having been here—above all, don't whisper it to the girl, for as sure as you do she will be off, and you will never be able to stop her! You can give the doctor what reason you like for your desire to have every attention paid to her, and ascertain from him when she will be ready to be moved. When he tells you, communicate with me, and I will have her off pretty quick!"

To all this Mrs. Pickman consented, and after a few more words Jonathan Wild left the inn.

The landlady could not repress the utterance of a sigh of relief when she saw him take his departure.

As, however, the reader will doubtless surmise, Jonathan Wild did not go far.

Indeed, he took care not to lose sight of the inn.

Then, standing still, he took a whistle, which he carried suspended from his neck by a chain, and blew three shrill blasts upon it.

The signal was responded to by three men—members of his gang—who quickly made their appearance.

In a low tone, he gave them instructions as to what they were to do.

As soon as he had finished speaking, these three men directed their steps towards the Prince of Wales inn.

Jonathan Wild watched them for some distance, and then, turning round, he walked slowly from the spot.

CHAPTER CCCXLVI.

BLUESKIN HAS A PERILOUS ADVENTURE WITH THE SENTINEL IN ST. JAMES'S PARK.

WHEN the police officer who fired at Blueskin saw that the bullet had produced no effect, and that our old friend beat a precipitate retreat, he called out to some of his companions to follow him.

To have got through the trap-door by springing up and catching hold of the edge of it was a feat which they were doubtful about being able to perform; and besides which, it would take so long to reach the roof one after the other in this manner that Blueskin would get a hopelessly long start of them.

With a quickness of thought for which he deserved credit, one of the officers opened the door on the landing that was nearest to him, and entered the chamber into which it led.

Hastening towards the window, he seized a table.

Several toilette articles were upon it, but he remorselessly swept them on to the floor, and hastened back to the landing with his prize.

This table, then, he placed immediately under the trap-door, and was about to mount upon it, when another of the officers came forward with a chair.

This chair was placed on the table, and it then became a perfectly easy matter to reach the trap-door.

All this was done with a rapidity that was really bewildering.

Up they sprang, one after another, and got on to the roof.

Here, of course, the first thing they saw was the young girl.

A momentary delay took place, for they could not control their astonishment.

Nevertheless, they did not lose sight of the original object of their pursuit.

Leaving two of their number with the girl—who, in accordance with the commands of their superior officer, they took prisoner—the remainder scrambled over the roof as fast as they could, in the hope ere long of finding something that would put them on the track of the fugitive.

The night, however, was unfavourable in the extreme for them.

The snow and sleet came down uncomfortably compounded, making the tiles so slippery that it was with the utmost difficulty they retained their footing.

The open trap-door over the empty house attracted their attention.

They gave one glance around them, and not being able to see a trace of a human being, they not unnaturally came to the conclusion that he had made his way in this direction.

Acting upon this supposition, they one after another jumped down on to the landing, and this was the lumbering sound which had reached Blueskin's ears after turning away from the window in the front room.

He would now have to be speedy in all his movements if he wished to escape capture, for, from the manner they had already behaved, he could tell the officers were desperately in earnest.

Despite, then, the pain which his sprained ankle occasioned him, Blueskin hastily descended the remaining flight of stairs.

In the passage below he was compelled to pause.

Wistfully he looked towards the front door, through which he would fain have made his way.

But that was impossible.

His sole hope lay in being able to find some mode of getting out at the back.

Unfortunately, however, he had no idea what kind of house it was, nor the plan upon which it had been built.

All he could do was to trust to his luck, with the hope that it would befriend him, as it had done on former occasions.

Almost at random, then, it may be said, he opened a door and passed through it.

He imagined it led into a room, but whether it did so or not he could not tell, for the most utter darkness surrounded him.

His first care, after having passed through this door, was to close it, and then feel for the fastenings.

There was a lock, but no key, so this was useless.

At the top and bottom of the door, however, was a bolt, and he immediately shot them into their sockets.

This would be a barrier to the approach of his foes, even if a slight one.

For a moment he was safe, and so he lighted a match, of which he had plenty in his possession.

The tiny flame which this gave forth enabled him to see that, as he had suspected, he was standing in a room.

It was entirely destitute of furniture.

Straight before him was the window, the shutters of which were closed. He advanced towards it immediately, but before he could reach it the match expired.

He did not delay to ignite another, but walked on in the dark with his hands extended before him.

He soon came in contact with the window, and, guided by his sense of touch alone, found the fastening by which it was secured, and undid it.

Quickly raising it in the sash, he felt for the fastenings of the shutters.

These consisted merely of two bolts, which he drew back readily enough, although they were literally rusted in their sockets.

The shutters were composed of two perpendicular leaves.

One of these he swung back, and then hastily got through the window.

As he did so, he could hear his enemies approaching.

In order to leave as little trace as he could of the route he had taken, he paused to close the window, and the shutters also, though of course, as he stood outside, he could fasten neither.

This done, he looked about him, and found himself in a rather large garden, which was thickly overgrown with vegetation.

Across this he made his way at full speed until he came to some palisades, which effectually prevented his further progress.

Here he paused, and looked back.

The trampling of feet struck upon his ears, and showed him that his foes had already tracked him to the garden, and were by no means disposed to give up the pursuit.

What was on the other side of the palisades it was now his business to discover.

At first he was baffled, but his joy may be imagined when he found that he was looking into St. James's Park.

Could he but gain this vast enclosure, he felt that he should have a better chance of making his escape than he had yet possessed.

The difficulty was to climb over the palings, which were a great height.

The crashing of the bushes warned him that the officers were very close behind, and this nerved him to make a desperate effort.

Jumping up, he caught hold of the branch of a tree, and using this as a means of raising himself, contrived to get to the top of the palings.

Once having accomplished this, the rest was easy.

Standing on them, he released his hold of the branch of the tree and jumped down, although the depth was considerable.

Just as he sprang into the air, a shot was fired.

One of the officers had seen him, but owing to Blueskin having changed his position so quickly, his aim was destroyed.

Our old friend reached the ground unhurt, but found that his troubles were by no means over.

Scarcely had his feet touched the ground, and before the report of the pistol had fairly died away, before he was startled by the dull tramp, tramp of many footsteps.

They were approaching him, and from the regular time that was kept he could tell they were soldiers on the march.

More he did not wait to hear, but sped across the spacious piece of ground near the Horse Guards with the blind haste of a hunted hare, intent only upon reaching the enclosure.

Suddenly he saw a man plant himself directly in his path.

It was a sentinel, who, alarmed in his monotonous walk, first by the pistol-shot and then the other noise which had succeeded it, placed himself directly in the way of the fugitive, thinking by this means to stop him.

Blueskia came on like a hurricane.

He saw the man place himself before him.

He saw him hold his musket horizontally before him.

But Blueskin could not stop himself, nor did he see the man until it was too late for him to turn aside.

A collision was inevitable.

It was a violent one.

In vain the sentinel strove to keep his feet.

He was dashed to the ground in an instant, and Blueskin tore over his body with scarcely diminished speed.

The soldiers he had heard approaching were those who were going the round, as it is called, to relieve the sentinels on duty.

The officer in command of them, perceiving that something of an unusual character was taking place, cried out "Halt!"

At this moment the police officers made their way into the park, and acquainted him with the particulars.

The officer then immediately ordered three blasts to be blown upon a bugle.

This signal he knew would be understood by the sentinels on guard at the different entrances and exits of the park.

Its meaning was, that they were to allow no person to pass out, but to take prisoner any person who attempted to do so.

The clear, shrill notes of the bugle rang out with beautiful effect in the silent park, and were clearly heard by all the sentinels, who immediately closed the gates and placed their backs against them.

Blueskin heard the sounds, and wondered greatly what they signified.

He was, however, unable to come to any conclusion further than that it was a signal of some sort.

It was not without difficulty that he escaped the clutch of the sentinel; but he did so, and directly afterwards reached the palings skirting the enclosure.

These were of no great height, and he vaulted over them easily.

He paused here for breath.

He could see nothing of his foes, though he strained his eyes to the utmost in endeavouring to do so.

To have lingered, however, would have been dangerous in the extreme, so he struck straight across the enclosure until he came to the water.

This he was obliged to skirt.

His idea was to throw his pursuers off his track if possible, and make his exit at one of the gates which happened to be at the greatest distance from Spring Gardens.

He little thought that all the sentinels were watching eagerly for him to make his appearance.

On he ran, then, somewhat comforted to find that the officers were not at his heels.

After some deliberation, Blueskin resolved to make his way out by Buckingham Gate.

Towards this he went in a straight line.

As he neared it, he slackened his pace.

It would be necessary to approach with caution, and in such a manner as would not excite suspicion.

He walked forward slowly and steadily.

He saw the soldier leaning against the gate; but, never dreaming for a moment that he would bar his progress, Blueskin steadily advanced towards the gate.

The soldier did not move.

Blueskin thought this strange, but, nevertheless, kept straight on.

No sooner, however, was he within a yard or so of the gate, than the soldier suddenly started forward and seized him.

"You can't pass here!" he said. "You are my prisoner!"

Our old friend now comprehended the full extent of his danger, and knew if he did not succeed in mastering this sentinel that the remainder of his enemies would be upon him, and then escape would be quite out of the question.

A desperate struggle ensued.

Finding himself seized, Blueskin strove his utmost to disengage himself from the soldier's grasp.

This, however, he found to be a by no means easy task, and in the encounter the sentinel's musket exploded.

The report was tremendous.

Blueskin uttered a curse at the occurrence of this unlucky incident, for he knew it would have the effect of informing the remainder of his enemies just where he was.

He renewed his efforts to get free; and, to his unbounded surprise, found the sentinel's hold gradually relax, and when Blueskin loosed him he fell heavily to the ground.

Our friend now understood what had taken place, and the event which at first seemed so inimical to him turned in his favour.

When the musket exploded, the charge had entered the sentinel's breast.

He had held on bravely to the last; but his strength failed him, and he fell backwards, either insensible or dead.

Which of the two it was, Blueskin knew not, and scarcely cared.

Stepping over the prostrate body of his foe, he reached the gate, and opened it wide enough to allow him to squeeze through.

When he stood on the outside, he felt in safety.

Looking through the palings, he could both see and hear his pursuers rapidly approaching.

More he did not wait for.

Now was his time to get fairly off.

At full speed, then, he turned to the left, and quickly gained the precincts of Westminster.

He so wound and doubled upon his course, that he felt confident his foes would not be able to track him, and then paused.

The night was about as uncomfortable now as well could be, and scarcely anyone was abroad.

For some time Blueskin had listened, but no sounds or signs of his late pursuers came upon his ears.

That he was terribly exhausted by all that he had gone through and the exertions he had made, the reader will readily believe.

He felt that to go further without rest or refreshment would be impossible, so he looked about him for some place where he could procure both these necessities.

But the streets were universally dark.

All the houses were closed, and Westminster streets at that time were only lighted by such dim rays as came through the windows of the various dwellings.

Slowly he staggered on, until in the distance he saw a faint glimmer, and towards that he directed his steps.

Upon reaching the place from which it proceeded, he found, as he had anticipated, that it was a small public-house.

He entered without hesitation, for both the house and the landlord were known to him, and he was aware that he could trust the latter.

He entered, sat down, and called for refreshment.

He was served, without being made the object of attention; and his first keen feeling of fatigue and exhaustion over, Blueskin buried his face in his hands, and, supporting his elbows upon the table, endeavoured to come to a decision as to his future course of action.

CHAPTER CXXIV

RELATES THE NOVEL EXPEDIENT WHICH THE BOW STREET RUNNERS ADOPTED TO CONVEY JACK SHEPPARD IN SAFETY TO NEWGATE.

HAVING seen Blueskin so far safely through the dangers with which he was threatened, we will return to his less fortunate companion.

So sudden was the attack which was made upon him, as we have related, that he really had no chance.

He was overwhelmed with numbers; and though he struggled gallantly to the last, yet he gained nothing by it.

His wrists were secured by handcuffs, and his captors kept a tight grasp upon him.

The members of the police force had some rather extraordinary ideas with regard to Jack Sheppard's powers.

Had he melted into air, or disappeared in any such extraordinary manner, they would scarcely have felt surprised.

On so many previous occasions he had proved himself

such a slippery character that they were quite prepared for anything.

For the most part, they could scarcely bring themselves to believe that they had at last got the daring offender in their custody.

The chief officer, however, had the good sense to send off to Bow Street for a reinforcement.

In the meantime, various plans were talked over for keeping their prisoner in safety.

Not one, however, was deemed satisfactory, and the debate continued until the reinforcement arrived.

It was deemed fitting to carry him direct to Newgate, and not to risk confining so adept a prison-breaker in one of the prisons, or houses of detention, as they are called.

They had no warrant to take him to Newgate, and there was some little informality in the proceeding; but this they imagined would be overlooked, especially when the fact of his having been sentenced to death was taken into consideration.

At any rate, whatever blame they might incur by so doing, they resolved to take him to Newgate; and here a fresh difficulty presented itself.

How was he to be conveyed thither?

No ordinary mode of transit would suit so extraordinary a character, and some special means must be devised.

They had the dread about their hearts that, somehow or other, he would elude them, and therefore they puzzled their brains to find some means which would render this impossible.

While this was going on, Jack Sheppard was surrounded by about a dozen police officers, everyone of whom had hold of him somewhere, and their number was sufficiently great to completely surround him.

His chances of escape were now few indeed, but his captors were very far from feeling either satisfied or safe.

But the question how he was to be taken from Spring Gardens to Newgate remained unsolved.

One mode that had been proposed and received with a tolerable amount of favour was, that Jack should be securely bound hand and foot in such a manner as not to be able to make the slightest movement.

In this helpless state he was to be placed in a hackney-coach, and as many police officers as the vehicle would hold were to get in after him, and some more on the box along with the driver and on the roof of the coach.

But this proposition was rejected as not being sufficiently secure.

They were afraid that at the last moment he would slip through their fingers.

At length it was agreed upon, as an amendment to the last proposition, that a strong box should be found of a size large enough to hold the prisoner.

In the bound and helpless state already described, he was to be placed into it, and then the lid of the box having been firmly fastened down, he was to be carried into the vestibule of Newgate, when the lid could be removed, and the prisoner lifted out.

This proposal was received with universal acclamation.

The only difficulty was the obtainment of a box.

This, however, could doubtless be got over, and those police officers who were not occupied in holding Jack dispersed themselves over the house in search of the article they required.

On the very floor upon which these events took place, and in a room close at hand, they found a large chest.

It was filled with linen, but they bundled this out very quickly and remorselessly.

Then they dragged the box out on to the landing.

The other officers hailed its appearance with a shout of satisfaction.

That they were all very much elated with the prize they had made the reader may feel sure, and not even the presence of their superior officer could repress it.

Jack looked at the large, lumbering-looking box with dismayful eyes.

He could not see how he was to escape from that.

The officers looked upon it, however, with very different feelings.

The lid was thrown back, and a glance at the interior showed that it was capable of containing a much larger person than Jack Sheppard.

Attention was now given to the task of pinioning him

with rope, a great quantity of which had just been brought by an officer who had been despatched to fetch it.

Jack was now bound over and over again, until, to look at him, he presented the appearance of a huge mass of knotted rope.

Fancying him sufficiently secure so far, they now lifted him as they would have lifted a corpse or any other mass of inanimate matter, and laid him on his back at the bottom of the box.

The lid was then shut down.

A key was sticking in the lock of the box, and this was at once turned by the chief officer, who placed the key in his pocket.

This was not, however, considered a sufficiently secure fastening for the box.

It was corded over in every direction with the remainder of the rope, every inch of which they used for this purpose.

The hearts of the police officers grew light.

When they looked upon the strongly-corded box they were at ease.

Clever as they believed Jack Sheppard to be, they did not for a moment think, with all his cleverness, he would be able to make his escape.

A muffled noise came from the interior of the box.

The prisoner was endeavouring to make himself heard.

Doubtless, although the sound came so faintly to their ears, he was shouting at the very top of his lungs.

One of the officers put his ear close to the lid of the box.

Jack's voice then became more audible and distinct.

"Air—air!" he cried. "Give me air, or I shall be suffocated!"

The officer looked up.

"What does he say?" asked the other officers.

"Why, he says he wants air," was the reply.

"Air—air?"

"Yes," said the chief police officer, who luckily happened to have a little more sense than his companions. "We must bore some holes in the box to let air in, or else the poor devil will be suffocated before we can get him to Newgate."

This intimation was received with dissatisfaction.

They feared that if the smallest hole was bored in the box, it would enable the prisoner to escape.

They looked, therefore, with the greatest distrust upon their chief when he said:

"Go and fetch a red-hot poker, somebody. We must make one or two holes, or he will be dead before we get there."

With very bad grace, one of the officers made his way down to one of the rooms where a fire was burning, where he could obtain a red-hot poker.

We may as well say here that the remainder of the force had searched the house, and made prisoners of Mother Robotham and the rest of their gang.

The police officer did not, of course, find a poker red-hot and ready to his hand.

He had to thrust one into the fire, and wait while it heated.

As the fire was a good one, it did not take very long, and so, with the instrument white hot, he made his way back to the landing at the top of the house, from which the box had not yet been moved.

Jack Sheppard continued his vociferations for air, and in some way or other managed to drum with his feet, either against the bottom or end of the box.

The chief police officer took the red-hot poker from his subordinate, and burned three holes with it in the top.

Jack Sheppard was really grateful for the fresh air that came in through these holes.

The chest was nearly air-tight, and had not his demand for air been attended to, he would certainly have been defunct by the time they got to Newgate.

However, after one or two inhalations of the fresh air he felt all right, and in order to show his captors that he was by no means dismayed or cast down by the triumph they had achieved over him, he cried out:

"Thank you, old fellow, I'm all right now, and Jack Sheppard is not the one to forget a kindness!"

The first impulse of the officers was to laugh at the very comical idea of their powerless prisoner doing them a kindness.

But, upon second thoughts, they became suddenly silent, and looked with fresh suspicion and distrust at the holes which their superior had bored.

They fancied Jack had some deep motive for making his request, and the words he had just spoken, as well as the tone of voice in which they were uttered, confirmed them in this idea.

They resolved to keep an extra sharp look-out, for if Jack Sheppard did escape, they made up their minds it should be through no want of vigilance upon their part.

They were aroused from these reflections by the voice of the chief officer, who commanded them to carry the box downstairs.

As each end was furnished with a strong and convenient iron handle, they found this task comparatively easy.

But the most amusing part of the business was to see the amount of solicitude with which each officer regarded the chest.

The two who had hold of the handles were looked upon with envy by the rest, who, however, comforted themselves with the prospect of a change in the bearers taking place.

Had their wishes been consulted, each one would have desired to have hold of the chest somewhere or other, for under no other circumstances could they feel that the prisoner was safe.

In this manner, then, and without the occurrence of any accident or incident, the chest was carried downstairs into the entrance-hall of the house, where, for a moment or two, it was deposited.

The chief police officer was not a whit less anxious for the security of Jack Sheppard than his inferiors, so he determined—although the distance to Newgate was considerable—that he would not trust to a hackney-coach, but have the chest carried to its destination, the officers under his orders to take in turns the task of carrying it.

When he made known this determination to his men, it was received by them with evident pleasure.

Of the two, they would much rather not have trusted to a hackney-coach.

They preferred the honour of carrying the chest to Newgate.

These instructions having been given, and as there was no need for any additional delay, the box was raised by two of the officers, and the remainder falling into a kind of procession in the rear, awaited their turn to carry the chest.

As they emerged from the house in Spring Gardens into the street, it looked like some strange and grotesque funeral train.

There were sufficient officers among those who had arrived as a reinforcement to take charge of the house, and to convey the prisoners to the lock-up, and those were the duties that were delegated to them.

As for those who had gone off in search of Blueskin, they had not yet returned.

We happen to know that they had rather a long chase after the object of their pursuit.

Leaving all these, however, we will direct the whole of our attention to the officers who carried the box in which Jack Sheppard lay in such a critical condition.

The weather, then, on that night—which, from its eventful character, we have so frequently had occasion to describe—had by no means improved.

The snow and sleet still came down, but it was now accompanied with a driving wind from the north-east, which much augmented its disagreeable character.

It blew steadily in the face of the officers nearly all the way to Newgate.

The sharp, icy particles with which it was laden seemed to strike their faces like so many needles.

But the exultant state of their minds made them comparatively heedless of the inclemency and disagreeableness of the weather.

On they trudged steadily enough, pausing every now and then to change bearers; for, though Jack himself was not heavy, the chest in which he was confined was, and the officers found it a great task upon their muscles to carry their burden far.

Accordingly, the chest was frequently put down and taken up again, to the great personal discomfort of the prisoner, who was rolled about from side to side with very little consideration.

For the information of those unacquainted with London,

it may be as well to state that the distance from the house in Spring Gardens, where Jack Sheppard was captured, to Newgate, is somewhere about two miles.

Owing to the slow rate at which they were compelled to walk, the journey consumed a considerable quantity of time.

Still the officers were satisfied.

At every step they took, the confidence they felt in having their prisoner secure increased.

Scarcely for a moment had one of them removed his eyes from the precious chest which contained so great a treasure.

They were reconciled to their labour, to the hail and snow and sleet—in fact, they were oblivious of all but one object, and that was to get Jack Sheppard safely within the doors of Newgate.

They calculated, and very plausibly too, that when once the box was safely inside Newgate, the lid could be raised, and the prisoner taken out without his having the slightest chance afforded him of making his escape.

Indeed, they told themselves that, before the lid of the box was raised, such precautions could be taken as to make it quite impossible.

We shall see how they got on after being so far successful.

For a moment, however, let us bestow a glance upon Jack Sheppard in his most uncomfortable abiding-place.

His demand for air was most certainly necessary; and had not the holes been bored in the lid of the box in the manner we have described, he would inevitably have been suffocated.

When the relief came, he was only just able to draw his breath in sudden and fitful gasps; and he could feel that the veins in his head were swelling and threatening to burst.

Almost the first monthful of fresh air that he obtained, however, had the effect of alleviating these symptoms.

But he found his situation the most uncomfortable one that he had ever been placed in.

Bound hand and foot as he was, in such a manner that he could not make the slightest movement without the greatest difficulty, and placed in this helpless state in a box that was four times larger than it need have been for such a purpose, it is easy to conceive how unpleasant he found it when the chest was lumbered about anyhow, for the officers did not study his personal comfort in the least.

Going downstairs was the worst.

Jack suddenly felt one end of the chest raised much higher than the other, and bump went his head against the other end.

CHAPTER CCCXLVIII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS MEET WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE ON OPENING THE LID OF THE CHEST.

THE force of the blow was sufficiently great partially to deprive Jack of his consciousness, and the remainder of the stairs were descended while his intellects were in too confused a state for him to have a very clear idea of what was taking place.

The bang with which the chest was placed down on the floor of the hall assisted to restore him to consciousness.

As the holes were in the lid of the chest, he was able to hear the consultation of the officers, and at first he listened with greedy attention.

Presently, however, becoming disgusted with their needless fears, he set his brain to work to devise some means of bettering his condition.

Desperate as his situation was, he had not abandoned all hope of making his escape, though he was well aware that the difficulties in the way of achieving his object were very great indeed.

But Jack was not of a disposition to magnify difficulties or to meet trouble half-way.

As he told himself, there was no harm in his trying to escape, even if he failed in doing so.

Accordingly, as a preliminary step, he set himself to work to find some means of disencumbering himself of the mass of rope with which he was covered.

Could he, like the Brothers Davenport, have called in the spirits to his aid in untying the knots, the said spirits would have been more useful than they have shown themselves to be as yet.

But Jack had no power of summoning spirits to do such material work.

Nevertheless, he was not without the knack of freeing himself from ropes tied about him, of which the gentlemen just alluded to have made so golden a harvest and so many fools.

Sensible minds cannot but have one feeling with regard to the effects produced by these exhibitions—or spiritual manifestations, as they are called.

That feeling is regret.

Regret that in the present day, so eminently the age of universal intelligence, people could be found with such imbecile minds as to place credence in so ridiculous and degrading a superstition.

But let the world be as wise as it will, there will always be fools.

It is a pity, perhaps; but so it always has been, and so it always will be.

We must ask the reader's pardon for digressing thus.

The similarity of the incident will probably be some excuse.

Jack then, we say, if he could not call in the spirits to aid him, as the Davenport Brothers pretend to do, yet was in possession, to a certain extent, of the old juggler's feat which they perform.

Accordingly, he set himself to work upon the ropes.

But he found his task one of extraordinary difficulty.

He could not make the least use of his hands or his feet.

But he was able to raise himself up into a curious kind of sitting posture, and by the aid of his teeth, which had been left at liberty, he set to work to gnaw through some of the cords by which his legs were bound together.

This was a task so tedious that probably no other person than Jack Sheppard would have attempted it.

But at length he got hold of a knot in his teeth, and with much more ease than he ever would have thought possible he untied it.

The same operation he performed upon another and another, and by the time the officers had finished their dispute, and picked up the chest to carry it into the street, he had freed himself of so many of the ropes as to be able to move with much greater ease and freedom than before.

Stimulated by the success with which his efforts had so far been crowned, he continued them with fresh vigour.

He was terribly at a loss for the use of his hands, and at first it seemed impossible for him to release them.

But having so far rid him of the ropes as to make the attempt to do this much easier than it had been, he tried and tried with a determination to succeed.

His wrists were secured by handcuffs, and his elbows were pinioned behind his back with rope.

His first effort was to remove the handcuffs.

As his hands were so small as almost to be styled diminutive, and so supple and flexible as to bend easily, he did not doubt that he should be able to achieve the feat which he had more than once before performed of slipping them off.

The only thing was that he was in an unfavourable and awkward position to make the attempt.

He tried.

The handcuffs were small, and fitted his wrists somewhat tightly.

Nevertheless, screwing his hand up into the smallest compass, he tried to draw it through the hard iron ring.

He tugged at it manfully, and bore the excruciating pain which every effort occasioned with the fortitude of a stoic.

His teeth were clenched, and his lips tightly compressed together.

But no sound—not even a murmur escaped him.

The skin was torn off the back of his hand in long strips.

He did not care, however, as long as he got his hand further and further through the handcuff.

At length it was free, and then, and not till then, did he almost give utterance to a cry.

It would have been one of triumph.

But he checked himself.

So long as one hand was released from the handcuff he cared not for the other.



JACK SHEPPARD IN THE STRONG ROOM OF NEWGATE.

He was content for the present that he should remain encumbered with it.

What he had next to do was to remove his arms from the cord by which they were secured.

This was hardest of all, for at first he could not attack it with his hands or his teeth.

By pressing his elbows together though, and writhing his body, he contrived to slip the rope lower and lower down his arms until at length he was freed from it altogether.

He was now quite released from all the bonds which his captors had placed upon him.

His whole body was at liberty, and if he did anything more towards his escape, he would have to make an attack upon the box.

It was just, however, as he had got rid of the noose that confined his arms behind his back, that the box was put down with a sudden crash which shook every bone in his body.

Of course Jack could not see where he was, and, therefore, No. 71.

fore, he did not take so much notice of this as he would have done had he been able to look about him.

It was not the first time by a great many that the box had been set down in this unceremonious manner.

In fact, it happened whenever a change of bearers took place, and this was pretty often as they drew nearer to Newgate, for the men's arms were tired.

They had no consideration for the comfort of their prisoner.

Each time they halted, down went the box with a bang, and not as though there was anything capable of feeling inside of it.

We have said, then, that as soon as his limbs were at liberty, the box was set down in the violent manner described.

Then the next sound which struck upon Jack's ears was a tremendous knocking.

Then he came to a correct conclusion as to where he was.

He had been put down on the pavement outside the

prison, and the knocking which he heard was a summons for admission upon the wicket of Newgate.

This was a discovery which made him almost mad, and he beat frantically against the sides of the chest in a vain effort to free himself.

The officers noticed this and laughed.

The apprehensions which had for so long held possession of their minds had for the most part vanished.

They had little doubt about being able to get their prisoner inside Newgate now that they had brought him so far.

The man on the lock must have been sound asleep for no notice whatever was taken of the officers' vigorous appeal, and they renewed it.

This time they met with a grumbling response, and a sleepy-looking jailer made his appearance at the wicket.

"Hullo!" he cried. "What is it? Is the blessed place afire?"

"No. But we have brought Jack Sheppard a prisoner."

The utterance of these few words produced a marvellous effect.

The man who seemed so sleepy became suddenly wide-awake.

There was the click of the well-oiled lock, and then the door of the prison grated open upon its hinges.

Once more, and for the last time, the officers stooped and took hold of the handles of the chest.

Two of them raised it, and it was not without some difficulty it was got up the narrow flight of stone steps and through the narrow door into the vestibule or lobby.

Upon the stone floor of this place the chest was again set down with a force sufficient to dislocate every bone in poor Jack's body.

A thousand echoes were raised in that dreary, vaulted place by the violence of the concussion.

The man on the lock looked with the utmost surprise upon the wooden chest, and it was not until he had reflected for some moments that he came to the conclusion that the famous Jack Sheppard must be within it.

Two more night-turnkeys, who had been sitting asleep in the little room adjoining the vestibule, aroused by the clatter and confusion of the new arrival now made their appearance.

As soon as he caught sight of them, the chief officer addressed them sternly.

"Go and call Mr. Noakes," he said. "Tell him we are here with a prisoner of the utmost importance."

"The gov'nor won't be very pleased at being disturbed, I can tell you," replied one of the turnkeys, grumblingly.

"Never mind that. You tell him that I am one of the chief officers from Bow Street, and have brought Jack Sheppard a prisoner to him, for whose body I want a receipt."

The effect produced upon the two turnkeys by this announcement was quite as great as that which it had produced upon the man on the lock.

"Ja—Jack Sheppard?" stammered one of them, at length.

"Yes, idiot!" cried the officer, in a rage.

"Gammon!" said the turnkey, as he glanced knowingly around him. "Where is he?"

"In that box," replied the officer.

The turnkeys gave one glance towards it.

That satisfied them, and they made their way at once into the interior of the prison, taking the route to the governor's apartments.

Until Mr. Noakes arrived, the officers could do nothing but keep their eyes on the chest.

This they did, and not satisfied apparently with this, several seated themselves upon the lid.

And so the time anxiously passed, until the governor made his appearance.

He was not long in coming.

The intelligence the two turnkeys communicated to him was of a character well calculated to induce him to make the utmost expedition.

He hastily slipped on his clothing, and having done so, took down a blunderbuss that hung from two hooks over the mantelpiece in his bedroom.

Armed with this formidable weapon, which he always kept loaded and ready for use, Mr. Noakes descended the

stairs with the turnkey who had brought the intelligence close at his heels.

On their way this man described the box in which Jack Sheppard was said to be, but, of course, he could give the governor of the prison no idea of how he had been put in it.

The governor had a personal feeling against Jack Sheppard.

He hated him with an intensity that knew no bound.

This is not to be wondered at.

Jack had, by his escapes, been the means of getting him into serious trouble with the authorities, and upon one occasion he nearly lost his situation.

In fact, had he not been backed up by people possessing great influence, he would infallibly have been discharged.

As it happened, he was allowed to remain in office; but this narrow escape engendered a feeling of the deepest hate in his bosom against Jack Sheppard, which would only be satisfied with his death.

That this daring offender was once more within the walls of Newgate was such a piece of good news that he dreaded to give credence to it, lest he should be disappointed.

With an anxiety which we leave the reader to depict, he made his way towards the vestibule.

When he made his appearance, a general movement took place among the officers.

They had for the most part clustered round the box containing their living treasure, but now they drew aside and disclosed it to view.

Upon seeing Mr. Noakes, the chief officer stepped forward.

"I have brought an important prisoner, Mr. Noakes," he said, "and one I should advise you to look sharp after, for fear he should slip through your fingers again."

The governor made a wry face.

Any allusion to Jack's escapes was excessively distasteful to him, and so, in a by no means pleasant tone of voice, he said:

"What prisoner have you brought, Mr. Officer?"

"No other than the notorious housebreaker, Jack Sheppard."

"Indeed! Where is he? I do not see him," said the governor, pretending ignorance of the contents of the chest.

"He is in that box, Mr. Noakes," said the chief officer, pointing to the object named.

"In that box? How came he there?"

"We captured him and bound him securely, but knowing what a slippery customer he was, we got that box and put him in it, and so have brought him safely to Newgate."

"A good plan," said the governor, with a grim smile. "If you have got him in that box, I will answer for it that don't get out of Newgate again."

"That's all right, then! He is in the box, never fear, so give me your receipt for having him in your custody."

"Fair and softly, good sir! Not so fast, if you please! I have not got him in custody yet. I must see whether he is in the box or not before I give a signature for him."

"Oh, that's all right enough!" said the officer. "You be prepared, and we'll have him out of the box pretty quick."

Mr. Noakes turned round, and directed his men to see that all the doors leading from the vestibule of the prison were properly closed and fastened.

This done, he next ordered them to furnish themselves with either blunderbusses or pistols.

There were plenty of these weapons in the lodge, and the turnkeys armed themselves with them.

The police officers drew their pistols, and cocked them.

All then stood round the box in an irregular circle, while the chief officer fumbled in his pocket for the key.

CHAPTER CCCXLIX.

JACK SHEPPARD IS CONIGNED TO THE STRONG ROOM IN NEWGATE, CALLED THE CASTLE.

UPON the countenances of all present an expression of great anxiety was depicted.

The chief officer having found the key, advanced with it rather nervously towards the box, and much of the confidence he had felt with respect to the security of his prisoner vanished.

He felt the necessity, however, of screwing his courage to the sticking place; and so, calling out to his men to be upon their guard, and requesting two others to approach and seize the prisoner as soon as the box was opened, he thrust the key into the lock and turned it round.

There was a sharp, clicking sound, and at the same moment the lid of the box was dashed violently open.

They were astounded.

Jack Sheppard, who they thought was so securely bound by cords, stood up in the box, with his limbs as free as their own.

Ere he could spring out and alight among his captors, as he fully intended to do, he was seized by the chief officer and his two subordinates.

Jack struggled desperately with them, but he could not shake off their grasp.

He was too overawed by the numerous firearms pointed at him.

It was impossible for him to escape all of them, and he gnashed his teeth together as he found that all his efforts had been in vain.

He had exhausted himself, and that was all.

This was indeed a most disheartening discovery to make, and he could not for a moment obtain the mastery over himself, so deeply was he disappointed.

Of this moment the police officers of course took every advantage, and several, laying aside their weapons, closed round him and held him secure.

Mr. Noakes had already taken the precaution to send to the smith to bring the fetters, and a tremendous clanking din in one of the corridors without now announced his approach.

He had got hold of the irons with one hand.

They were too heavy to carry, and so he dragged them along the stone floor of the passage after him.

It was the scraping of the iron over the stones that made such a clatter.

At a sign from Mr. Noakes a door was opened, and then the smith entered.

In addition to the irons, he carried with him a small portable anvil, and a hammer and rivets.

His face expanded into a grin when he saw Jack Sheppard, and without a moment's hesitation or delay he walked right up to the box.

"Aha, Mr. Sheppard! how do you do?" he said, in a taunting voice, and throwing his implements down as he spoke. "You don't look quite so fresh and well as you did the last time I performed this little service for you! Ah, well, you have given me a deal of trouble; but when you escaped last time I made up my mind that I would keep you secure if ever you passed through my hands again, and so I set to work to make a set of jewelry heavier and stronger than had ever been seen before. I thought I was never going to have an opportunity of using them; but here you are again, and here are the irons, and if you get out of them I will forfeit my head."

While running on in this style, the smith was busy in arranging his different articles, and began to place them upon Jack.

The fetters were really of enormous size and great weight, and no doubt they had been made expressly for Jack Sheppard.

The smith handled them affectionately, and clasped the rings round Jack's ankles, and riveted them there with an expression of satisfaction on his countenance that would, under other circumstances, have been highly amusing to witness.

Jack Sheppard had no chance of making any resistance, and he forbore to attempt it, for he knew how utterly useless it would be.

So he stood still enough there while the smith gabbled on, and while the fetters were secured to his person.

When this was finished, he found himself loaded with about two hundredweight of iron; but, for all that, the officers did not deem it safe to release their grasp, though Jack could not possibly have moved, except slowly and with great difficulty.

The chief officer, however, now ventured to renew his request to the governor for a receipt to the effect that he

had delivered the prisoner, and this Mr. Noakes could no longer refuse to furnish.

He accordingly filled up and signed the printed form that was used on such occasions, and handed it to the officer, who he at the same time requested to remain until he had seen Jack properly disposed of in a cell.

To this no objection was made, and the governor called out to one of the turnkeys to get the key of the Castle.

The Castle was the name that was given to a strong room in Newgate which in former times, tradition said, was the place where many valuables were kept, though what valuables were likely to be in Newgate to require guarding we know not.

Neither do we know why it was called the Castle, without it was in reference to its strength.

The turnkey looked surprised at the governor's mandate, though he said nothing, but simply took down the keys as he had been bid.

The other turnkeys provided themselves with lanterns, and the whole party formed themselves into a procession, and proceeded in the direction of the Castle.

What kind of a place this was Jack Sheppard had no idea, for he had never heard of it before, and the strangeness of the name filled him with curiosity.

The distance from the vestibule of the prison to the strong room was not very great, but Jack found the excessive weight of his fetters made it painful in the extreme for him to walk.

The officers, the turnkeys, and the governor noted this with satisfaction, for it seemed to them an additional assurance that Jack would not this time be able to escape.

The smith rubbed his grimy hands together, and chuckled with satisfaction.

Headless, but not unconscious of all this, Jack kept on steadily, summoning all the strength he could, and disguising, as well as he was able, the effort it cost him to walk.

At length, to his relief, the door of the Castle was reached.

The whole party halted in the passage while the turnkey unlocked the ponderous door.

A long time had elapsed since that room had been last entered, and the wards of the lock had got rusted, so that the key acted upon them with difficulty.

By exerting his utmost strength, the turnkey succeeded in forcing back the bolt of the lock, and then a vigorous push sent the door open upon its hinges.

The lanterns which the turnkeys carried only insufficiently illuminated the place, but Jack took care to make all the use of his eyes that he possibly could.

He took in everything at one comprehensive glance, and dwelt upon those details which he thought would be of service to him.

He was not allowed so much time for this as he could have wished, for his captors turned him into the cell.

It was a gloomy-looking place, though somewhat large. But its smooth, damp walls had a disagreeable aspect.

There was one grated window, and through this there came the first faint rays of the approaching daylight, which, mingling with the light of the lanterns, gave the place an appearance of additional ghastliness.

Jack Sheppard was led to one portion of the wall where two staples were driven into the masonry.

From both of these depended an iron chain of massive links.

He was placed close to one, and the smith attached the chain to the iron band that was fastened round his waist.

Surely, now one would have thought he was helpless enough, but his foes were not satisfied.

They had noticed how he had contrived to get rid of the other pair of handcuffs, and another pair a size smaller was produced.

These were fastened round his wrists, in which they made, when clasped, deep and painful indentations.

The governor, and those who were with him, now at last thought he was secure, and having, one after another, examined his fetters, he was left to himself.

The heavy door was dragged shut.

The key was turned in the lock, the bolts shot into their sockets, and every means taken to make it fast.

With a feeling of satisfaction they all made their way to the vestibule again, where Mr. Noakes congratulated the officers, and they separated mutually pleased with each other.

Let us return to Jack in his lonely prison cell.

This was a sudden and unexpected reverse of fortune.

It had come upon him at a moment when he least expected such a catastrophe, and his brain was puzzled to know how it had been brought about, for Jack was not in possession of those facts with which we have made the reader acquainted respecting the presence of the police-officers at Mother Robotham's, in Spring Gardens.

This was a mystery to him, and was likely to remain so, for he had no means of obtaining any intelligence upon the subject.

When his captors left him, Jack did not attempt to move from his position.

He felt the need of a little reflection, and so he simply leaned his back against the wall and folded his arms across his breast.

In this attitude he gave himself up to thought.

There was much to distress, and nothing to comfort him, and he sighed heavily when he thought of his position.

There was nothing cheering either in the objects with which he was surrounded or in the future that lay before him.

For the first time in his life, Jack Sheppard felt a sensation akin to despair, or hopelessness.

The reader can account for it.

Throughout the many and strange incidents of his chequered career we have seen how he has borne lightly, every reverse of fortune.

Jonathan Wild found him more than a match in consequence of his undauntedness and extraordinary energy.

Hitherto Jack had risen superior to every misfortune which had assailed him, and had set at defiance all that an adverse fate could accomplish.

Never before had he been so cast down as he was at this moment.

Never had he felt so unenergetic.

And why? Edgworth Bess was the cause.

While he had seen her the object of the thief-taker's persecution he had felt himself possessed of the vigour of a dozen men.

But the last intelligence he had heard respecting her was the cruellest shock of all.

Patiently and perseveringly he had traced her to Mother Robotham's infamous abode.

Up to this moment it was clear that she had not been allowed to act according to her own will, but had been compelled to succumb to that of others.

But what dreadful news concerning her had the young girl not communicated?

Edgworth Bess had been introduced to some young nobleman, and had voluntarily quitted the house in his company, and had not been seen or heard of since.

This was a thought that was maddening to Jack, and, strive as he would, he could not banish it from his mind.

What was he to think of such a circumstance?

Full well he recollected the circumstances under which he had parted with Edgworth Bess.

He knew she had fled from him in anger and disgust.

He had refused her requests—he had turned a deaf ear to all her entreaties.

For doing so, she left him, and he had never seen her since.

She had eluded his closest search, until by accident he learned that she was at Mother Robotham's.

He arrived here only to receive news a thousand times more distressing than any which had come to his ears.

Probably she no longer loved him, since he had shown her that he could refuse that which she so earnestly requested.

He ground his teeth, as he thought that this young nobleman had constituted himself her champion and defender, and had, as a preliminary step, rescued her from that house.

He pictured in his mind the poor heiress instated in her rights by means of this unknown nobleman, and then what would be more natural than for Edgworth Bess to bestow her affections upon him, as a recompense for what he had done.

With these and a thousand similar tortures did Jack rack his mind until he wrought himself up into a state of positive frenzy.

He felt, indeed, that he was rapidly going mad, and he

dashed his head against the stone wall with all the fury of delirium.

Could but some one at that moment have whispered in his ears a full account of all that had taken place!

What a startling effect would that communication have produced!

No longer would he have given way to the impotency of madness and grief.

Once more would he have been endowed with that wonderful and resistless energy which surprised the whole world.

Impossible as the task may have seemed, he would have set about making his escape.

Little did he think that all those tortures he suffered so exquisitely were created by and existed solely in his imagination.

Such, however, was the case; and at that very moment Edgworth Bess was more securely in the power of the villainous thief-taker than she had ever been, for both Jack and Blueskin were in ignorance of her situation.

CHAPTER CCCL.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE RESOLVES TO LOOK SHARP AFTER HIS PRISONER, AND HAS AN EXTRAORDINARY INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN WILD.

MR. NOAKES, the Governor of Newgate, after bidding adieu to the chief officer from Bow Street, stood for a moment on the flight of stone steps which lead from the door of the prison into the street.

There was a look of extreme satisfaction visible upon his countenance as he gazed after the retreating forms of the officers, and he chuckled oddly in his throat.

"I have him here once more!" he said, rubbing his hands one over the other with disagreeable briskness. "I have him once more; and I will take such precaution this time that were he ten thousand times as clever as he is he should not have the least chance of escape. I will make it my special business to look after him myself, and I care not how much inconvenience I may have to put up with in consequence."

Muttering these words half aloud, half to himself, Mr. Noakes turned round and entered the prison.

Giving a few orders to his men, he made his way to his own bedchamber.

Upon arriving here, however, he felt but little inclination to turn in again, and still less when he found that day had fairly dawned.

He had dressed himself rather hastily when he had been summoned, but now he set to work to change all that.

"Ha, ha!" he muttered, "I wonder whether Jonathan Wild is up. I dare say he is. We have not been quite such good friends lately as we used to be. Well, I don't wonder at it, for no doubt he thought I was careless; but we shall be good friends now. I will go and tell him that I have got Jack Sheppard again—ha, ha!"

The prospect of making this communication to the thief-taker seemed to please the Governor exceedingly.

Soon, however, his thoughts took a fresh direction.

"I must take care he don't escape again," he said, "or I shall never be able to show my face. But I haven't much fear. It's no good trusting to those turnkeys, though! I believe they are all in league with him. I will take the matter entirely into my own hands. Let me think now, what had best be done?"

Mr. Noakes finished the rest of his toilet in profound reflection.

He had rather a thick head, and thinking was always a difficult task for him.

As for inventive power he had none, and yet, at length, by dint of hard thought he hit upon a scheme that really was excellently adapted to answer his purpose.

He was quite pleased with it.

"I know what I will do," he said. "Capital! That will astonish Mr. Jack, I rather think! I will go every two hours and visit him in his dungeon. That's the plan! Why if he was to try to escape, he could not do much in two hours. That shall be it. I will go regularly, and never miss. They won't get the better of me this time, I know!"

These words were on his lips as he descended the staircase.

Upon reaching the ground-floor, however, he paused, "Let me see!" he said. "I was going to run round the corner and see whether Jonathan was at home or not, but before I do, I will pay Mr. Jack his first visit; I can't be too careful."

Mr. Noakes accordingly changed his course, and instead of going out he repaired to the vestibule.

The turnkeys looked rather surprised and confused when he entered, for they by no means expected that he would make his appearance again so soon.

They had been standing in a group near the man on the lock, talking about the prisoner, and making bets whether he would, or would not, escape.

As soon as Mr. Noakes came in they separated.

The Governor looked all round and frowned, but said nothing.

He walked straight up to the hook upon which a particular bunch of keys hung, and taking them he unlocked a door, and closing it after him, disappeared.

The turnkeys were naturally much surprised at this unusual proceeding, and wondered what it meant.

They were, however, unable to come to any conclusion, and stood staring at the door until the Governor returned.

He was not long absent.

He threaded the passages leading to the Castle with rapidity which practice alone could have acquired.

Upon reaching the immense door he removed the ponderous fastenings and opened it.

A dim sort of twilight filled the cell, and by the aid of this he saw Jack Sheppard sitting done on the stone-bench that was near the portion of the wall to which he was chained.

He saw the prisoner's white face bent seriously upon him for a moment, and then withdrawn.

As soon as he saw who it was that had come to pay him a visit, Jack resumed his old position, and took no more notice than he would if he had still remained alone.

Mr. Noakes entered the cell and closed the door behind him.

He came close up to Jack, who once more raised his head and looked him full in the face.

Mr. Noakes said nothing in reply to his inquiring glance, but, with a well-practised eye, examined the fetters in every part.

Indeed he was not satisfied with his eye only, for he felt them also with his hand.

They were quite secure, and at present it was certain that they had not been tampered with in any way.

With a grunt of satisfaction he then turned away.

Once Jack opened his lips as if about to speak, but he closed them again without uttering a word, as though, upon second thought, he had deemed it most prudent to remain silent.

He shrank back slightly when the Governor touched him, but he could not escape.

Mr. Noakes, however, saw the movement and understood it, and he scowled.

He, too, remained silent, and as soon as he had assured himself that his prisoner was perfectly safe and in the same condition as he had been left, he closed the door, and fastened it on the outside with scrupulous care.

He then retraced his steps to the lobby, where he hung the bunch of keys upon the peg from which he had taken them.

The turnkeys had not yet recovered from their surprise.

Their curiosity was excited to the utmost degree.

They guessed the Governor had just been to Jack's cell, but for what purpose after he had so soon been placed in it, they were at a loss to imagine.

The more the Governor thought of his scheme the more his mind approved of it, and there was a contented smile upon his face as he said to the man on the lock:

"Open the door, Smith! I am going out, but I shall be back in less than five minutes!"

Smith obeyed instantly.

He took the brightly-polished key from his pocket and inserted it in the lock.

There was a click, and then the door was open.

"Keep careful watch, Smith!" said the Governor as he crossed the threshold.

"Never fear, sir!" was the reply.

Slowly Mr. Noakes descended the steps and stood on the footpath of the Old Bailey.

He was smiling more contentedly than ever.

He thought what a pleasing reception Jonathan Wild would give him, and how acceptable the intelligence would be which he was about to communicate to the thief-taker.

The breach which had for some time existed between them would be completely healed over, and Mr. Noakes well understood the advantage derivable from being on good terms with the villain Jonathan.

With an airy, springy step, the Governor walked along the Old Bailey and turned the corner into Newgate Street.

It was very early in the morning.

The sun had risen, but none of his beams as yet shone into the streets.

There was an uncomfortable hazy mist hanging about, and the air was raw and cold.

The roads, owing to the fall of snow and sleet during the night, were in a shocking state, but Mr. Noakes heeded not all this; in fact, he was scarcely conscious of it, although he shivered as he went along.

The distance, however, from the door of Newgate to Jonathan's house was very trifling, and he soon stood upon the doorstep of No. 1, Newgate Street.

Raising the ponderous knocker, he brought it down with such force as threatened to split the panel.

There was not a second's delay in opening the door.

The reason was that Jonathan was expected.

It was Tonks who appeared, and he looked much surprised when he saw the Governor of Newgate, for he knew that he and the thief-taker had not been very good friends lately.

Mr. Noakes's face, too, was full of importance, and so Tonks jumped to the conclusion in a moment that something extraordinary had taken place.

"Mr. Wild is not in!" he said, anticipating the Governor's question.

Mr. Noakes frowned and looked disappointed.

"Not in?" he repeated, interrogatively. "Are you sure of that? I have some intelligence of the most important character to communicate!"

"No, he is not in!" was the reply. "He has been out all night!"

"When do you expect him to return, then?"

Tonks grinned.

"I do not know, Mr. Noakes. Old Johnny always manages to arrive when he is least expected!"

"Then you can give me no information as to when he is likely to return?"

"No, sir, nor nobody else, but I'll tell you what I can do?"

"What?"

"Why, if you like, when he comes in, I will either send word to let you know, or else tell him you want to see him."

"Very well, Tonks. Tell him to come to the prison to me, as I have some intelligence of the utmost importance."

"All right, Mr. Noakes!"

The Governor turned round and was about to descend the steps when he caught sight of a hackney-coach crossing over from Skinner Street.

He noticed it because it was the only vehicle which happened to be in sight.

He paused in his descent, for he thought there was just a chance that it contained the thief-taker.

He resolved to see.

It was indeed Jonathan Wild who was approaching.

The reader will recollect that after he left the Prince of Wales Inn, he gave instructions to three of his men to watch the house closely, and they walked away.

Ere he had gone many steps he was overtaken by a hackney-coach.

He hailed it instantly, and instructed the coachman to drive him to Newgate Street.

Upon nearing his destination the thief-taker projected his head out of the window of the carriage in order to tell the driver where to stop.

As he did so, to his great surprise he saw Mr. Noakes standing on the door-step.

He knew in a moment that something of an extraordinary character had occurred, for the Governor's face was full of expectation.

Jonathan hastily alighted from the vehicle, paid the man his fare, and then ran up the steps.

Mr. Noakes retreated into the hall.

"What has happened?" asked Wild, instantly.

"I will tell you in a moment!" replied the Governor, with a bland smile. "It is good news that I have to communicate!"

"Come this way, then," said Jonathan, and as he spoke he made his way upstairs.

Mr. Noakes followed closely.

The thief-taker led the way to the sitting-room, which he has so frequently had occasion to describe.

He motioned to his visitor to take a seat, and sank down himself upon a chair opposite.

But Jonathan took this precaution.

He sat with his back to the window, while the Governor of Newgate had his face turned towards it.

"Well!" said Jonathan, the moment he had seated himself. "What is the news?"

"I will tell you, Mr. Wild, first of all, I want to make a few remarks!"

"Cut it short, then!" was the growling response.

"I shall be happy to comply with your wishes in this respect as well as others, Mr. Wild. Of course I need only say that of late we have not been quite such good friends as we were some time back. Nor need I mention the reason. I am sure I am very sorry for what has occurred, but really it was no fault of mine—I could not help it."

"Oh, never mind all that! If you have got anything to say, let's have it without so much d—d preface!"

"Very good, Mr. Wild, only I really did wish just to mention these things. But, however, since you don't like it I will say no more, except that when that unfortunate event happened I made up my mind to atone for it if possible, and that is the reason I have never come near since; 'for,' said I to myself, 'of course Mr. Wild is very much vexed about what has taken place I know he had set his heart upon having the sentence carried out, and—'"

"Oh, curse all that!" said Wild, in a rage. "If you are going on like that I am off!"

"I only wanted to prepare your mind."

"Prepare be d—d! What has happened?"

"Nothing very serious! Don't be alarmed! You will be pleased when you hear that—"

"What? Curse you, why don't you go on?"

"Why, that Jack Sheppard is a prisoner in Newgate."

CHAPTER CCCLI.

JONATHAN WILD PAYS A VISIT TO JACK SHEPPARD IN THE CASTLE.

JONATHAN WILD had half risen from his chair in his anger at the Governor's prolixity.

But when he heard the startling and unexpected intelligence that Jack Sheppard was once more a prisoner in Newgate, he sunk down in his seat literally gasping with astonishment.

Recovering himself in a moment, however, he sprang up with a yell that was enough to electrify anyone, and then he grasped the governor by the throat.

He shook his head to and fro with great violence, and so tight was his grasp that poor Mr. Noakes very rapidly got red in the face.

"What do you mean?" roared Wild, "What do you mean? How dare you come and tell me such a thing to my face! Jack Sheppard in Newgate? Impossible!"

The Governor gesticulated violently, for speak he could not.

The first excitement produced by the surprise being over, Jonathan released his grasp.

"Speak!" he said, "Tell me that again!"

Mr. Noakes rubbed his throat and looked wishfully at the door, as though he would gladly enough have made his way out of the apartment.

There was nothing to hinder him now that Wild had let go, but he had too much dread of his ferocious companion to make the attempt.

He relapsed into his chair again, and Wild sank down down into his.

Thus the pair sat and contemplated each other in silence, while the Governor was wholly occupied in attempting to recover the proper use of his breath.

He opened and shut his mouth, gasping like a fish that

is suddenly lifted out of the water and placed upon the ground.

The thief-taker, in the meantime, recollected himself, and overcame the first shock of his surprise.

"Speak!" he said at length. "Speak, I say, and tell me! Can it be possible that—that—; but no, it is folly! there is some mistake——!"

"You have treated me very roughly, Mr. Wild!" said the Governor, ruefully; "very roughly indeed! I little thought that you would repay me in such a manner, for bringing you such important intelligence——!"

Jonathan frowned.

"Once for all," he said, "tell me, and tell me truly, is this some jest, or is it really true that Jack Sheppard is in Newgate?"

"It is perfectly true, Mr. Wild! Believe me it is, and no jest! I left him then not a quarter of an hour ago!"

Jonathan again started to his feet, but sank back into his seat.

"More!—more!" he cried. "You must tell me more about this extraordinary affair! I cannot believe it! Tell me all the particulars."

Mr. Noakes did not hesitate to do so.

He told him not exactly all that the reader is acquainted with, but very nearly all—at any rate, sufficient to make Jonathan clearly understand the aspect of affairs.

Its circumstantial character had the effect of removing all doubt from Jonathan's mind, who was at first afraid to believe in so much good fortune, lest it should in the end turn out to be untrue.

Now, however, he felt almost certain.

He questioned the Governor very closely; for it puzzled Wild to think how they came to be in the house in Spring Gardens.

He could not, for the life of him, imagine what brought them there.

He was already sufficiently puzzled about Edgworth Bess.

That she was separated from her two protectors he well knew; but he imagined she had been left in some place of safety by one of them.

How came she then to be flying through the streets?

How came she to attempt to commit suicide by leaping into the Thames?

Some powerful motive must have led to it he knew; for it was the last deed which he thought she would have committed.

This was an enigma which the thief-taker had no power to solve; and he tortured his brain to no effect.

He trusted ere long to be able to discover more.

"I cannot doubt any longer!" said Wild, at length. "Pardon me for treating you as I did, it was the effect of excitement, merely. However, as you said at first, we have not been such good friends lately as we used to be; but there is no reason why that should continue, so give me your hand, and we will forget the transactions of the last few weeks!"

"I am quite willing!" said Mr. Noakes with a grin, as he took the huge rough hand extended towards him. "I would much rather have you for a friend than an enemy!"

"We shall get on best you may depend, while we are friendly," returned Jonathan; "because we are in a position to be of great service to each other!"

"Just so!"

The thief-taker went to the cupboard, and produced a bottle of brandy and two glasses.

"We will just have one dram," he said, as he filled his own glass and pushed the bottle towards the Governor—"just one dram, and we will drink to our future friendship!"

Mr. Noakes filled up his glass, and drank off the contents with great readiness.

"Although my doubts are now quite at an end," said Jonathan, as he put his glass down on the table, "still I am sure I shall not feel perfectly satisfied until I have been to Newgate and seen the prisoner with my own eyes."

"Very likely, Mr. Wild," was the rejoinder "I can quite understand what that feeling is. I was, indeed, going to propose that you should do so, only you did not allow me an opportunity."

"Well, well—it's all right; but I feel that it would do my heart good, and reconcile me to all my recent failures, if I could see him so secure as you describe him to be!"

"You will find I have not deceived you in any respect, Mr. Wild!" said the Governor, rising; "and if Jack Sheppard, with all his cunning and cleverness, gets out of Newgate this time, I will forfeit my hand!—My hand, did I say?—I mean my head!"

"You had better keep him secure!" said Jonathan, significantly; "for if he was to escape again, you would most certainly lose your situation."

"I am not afraid," said the governor, complaisantly. "He is so heavily ironed, that he cannot move at all, except with the greatest difficulty; and then, I have hit upon another device for keeping him safe. Trust me, he shall not escape!"

"What is your device? Tell it to me, in order that I may judge of its excellence."

"Well, Mr. Wild, it involves a great deal of trouble and inconvenience upon my part; but then, it is such a serious matter, that I don't mind that."

"What is it?"

"I have determined, no matter what shall stand in the way, to personally pay a visit to Jack every two hours, and ascertain for myself that all his fetters are secure. He can't do much in two hours, and I should find it out directly, so I take it he cannot possibly escape!"

"It is an excellent plan!" said Wild, in genuine approval. "And you deserve great credit for having devised it! I have never heard of a better plan. It is far superior to trusting to fetters, bolts, or bars."

"I am glad it meets with your approval, Mr. Wild," said the Governor—"very glad, because it convinces me of the excellence of the scheme!"

"Mind you fully act up to your intentions. Let me caution you against growing careless!"

"You have no need whatever to do so, I can assure you!"

"Well, I do believe it would give you almost as much pleasure as it would give me, if you could see him safely tucked up at Tyburn."

"It would—it would!"

"I thought so, for he has brought you into trouble enough already."

"Curse him! yes, so he has."

"He has, and so let me caution you not to grow careless. You will only have this trouble for a few days, for I will make it my business to see the Secretary of State upon the matter, and will do all I can to get him executed with as little delay as possible, and I have no doubt my representations will produce full effect!"

"No doubt they will, and I trust you will carry out this resolution, for I can tell you it is not a pleasant duty!"

"I know that, but it will not do for you to depute it to anyone else!"

"Certainly not. There is no one that I can place sufficient trust in, and the least neglect——"

"Will be taken the utmost advantage of, for I know Jack's character well. But come, fill up your glass! We will have just one more before we start!"

The brandy was poured out in no stinted quantity into the two goblets, and drank in large draughts.

Both Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes had good reason to feel perfectly satisfied with each other.

The thief-taker's brain was, however, too busy to allow him to remain long in one position.

He was the first to empty his glass, and he rose to his feet as a hint that he was ready, and waiting to make a start.

The Governor took the hint, and swallowed down the brandy at one gulp.

"I am at your service entirely, Mr. Wild—entirely at your service!"

"Come, then, I am waiting to go. You have no idea how impatient I feel to satisfy myself that Jack Sheppard is really the helpless prisoner you state him to be!"

"Follow me then, Mr. Wild, and you will find, when you enter the Castle, that I have told you nothing but the bare truth!"

"I shall be so much the better pleased, then, and I shall have no room to doubt."

Mr. Noakes opened the door, and held it by the handle in order that the thief-taker might pass out before him.

Jonathan was pleased with this mark of respect, and he descended the stairs with a feeling of greater satisfaction about his heart than he had felt for some time past.

Tonks saw them descend, both wearing such an amiable

and contented expression upon their countenances, and he marvelled greatly what could be the cause of it.

Seeing them come towards the door, he opened it, and both passed out, arm-in-arm.

Tonks watched them walk past the prison wall, and turn the corner into the Old Bailey.

"There's summat up!" he remarked, when he closed the door, after they had vanished from his sight. "There's summat up I feel confident, but I'm blessed if I can think what!"

The hour was a very early one yet, for the Governor's interview with the thief-taker had not occupied a very long time.

The streets were growing fuller of vehicles and pedestrians; but most of the shops were closed, and the business of the day had not begun.

The intelligence of Jack Sheppard's capture had consequently not become generally known, indeed there were at present few acquainted with it except the officials of the prisons.

The news would soon spread, however, and upon turning the corner of the Old Bailey Mr. Noakes and Jonathan saw that a small group of people had already collected round the wicket of Newgate.

When he perceived this Mr. Noakes said:

"You see the news is getting wind, Mr. Wild!"

"Curse them, yes! What do they want to stand there for like a parcel of idiots? I hate to have to pass through a crowd!"

This was the truth, for Jonathan was very unpopular among a very large class of persons, and he was sure to hear something unpleasant, and perhaps be roughly treated too.

Mr. Noakes noticed his vexation, and he said:

"It rejoices me to think that I am again in a position, to render you a service!"

"What service?"

"I can enable you to reach the interior of Newgate without passing through that crowd!"

"How?"

"Easy enough! Look—here is the door leading into my apartments in the prison—we can enter this way!"

Mr. Noakes paused as he spoke at the private door leading into the Governor's house.

He rang the bell rather sharply, and Jonathan took care to stand with his back to the people, for he did not even wish to be recognised if he could help it.

The Governor's summons for admission was very quickly responded to, and then the pair entered.

Jonathan was exceedingly pleased to think he had avoided the people; and now he said, in quite a brisk tone of voice:

"Do not hesitate or dally any longer, Mr. Noakes. Make your way to the cell as quickly as you can, for I confess my impatience to see him knows no bound."

"You shall not be detained any longer than it takes us to walk from here to the Castle. By-the-by, do you know where the Castle is situated?"

Jonathan reflected a moment.

"It is under the Red Room, is it not?"

"Yes, that is it."

"It is a very strong room, is it not, and one that has not been used for a cell for a long time?"

"Yes, I believe so. At any rate, since I have been in office here, it has never been used."

"I thought not; and the Red Chamber above—that is a strong room?"

"Oh, yes, and the lock of that door has not been undone for at least seven years."

"He ought to be safe then."

"You are right!"

Whilst this conversation took place, the speakers did not remain still, but made their way towards the vestibule, which place they reached just as the Governor uttered the last words.

The turnkeys looked rather surprised when they saw him appear, for they had no idea that he had returned, and their astonishment increased when they saw Jonathan Wild at his heels.

Without saying a word to anyone, Mr. Noakes went up to the peg again, and took down the bunch of keys.

Wild kept close to him, following him everywhere.

The Governor passed through the first door, and closed it after them.

They then stood in a rather dark passage, and Jonathan said:

"Shall you not want a light?"

"No, Mr. Wild," was the reply. "Follow me!"

"But the cell—is that light?"

"Oh, yes! There is a good-sized grated window, and you can see everything distinctly enough."

"Right! That is all I desire."

Jonathan Wild now directed all his attention to following in the steps of his companion, for the passages were for the most part involved in darkness, and the thief-taker was by no means so familiar with the intricacies of Newgate as the Governor, and it behoved him to be careful.

The distance from the door of the vestibule to the door of the Castle was not great, and they soon reached it.

Jonathan noted with satisfaction the ponderous fastenings with which it was secured.

The Governor removed them, and then unlocked the door.

Jonathan's breath came short and thick in the intensity of his anxiety and curiosity to catch sight of the stripling who had been the bane of his life—who had caused him more trouble than all the rest of the world beside, and who had thwarted him in his most daring schemes.

Wild did not wait for the Governor to open the door, but as soon as he heard the snap of the lock, he rushed at it, and pushed it violently back up its hinges.

CHAPTER CCCLII.

JONATHAN WILD EXULTS OVER THE AGONY AND DESPAIR OF HIS VICTIM.

LET us just take one passing glance at the proceedings of Jack Sheppard.

Gloomy and wretched in the extreme, as we have described in a former chapter, were his reflections in that lonely and dreary prison cell.

How Jonathan Wild would have exulted if he could have seen him thus depressed with despair.

But Jack indulged in his emotions, and gave way to these sad thoughts, simply because he believed himself in utter solitude.

Had he fancied for a moment that any eye was fixed upon him, he would have preserved a defiant demeanour to the last, no matter how wretched the state of his mind might really be.

Gradually the faint light which struggled in through the grated window of the cell increased in brightness, so that, almost before he was aware of it, Jack found he could see all around him with tolerable distinctness.

To anyone coming into the cell from the open air, the place would seem to be involved in almost total darkness, but Jack's eyes had become habituated to the gloom.

Slight as this circumstance was, and dim as was the light, yet it had a cheering effect upon Jack's saddened spirits, after being so long in total darkness, as he had been.

He recovered himself so much as to stand up without the assistance of the wall, against which he had hitherto been leaning.

He tried the length of the chain by which he was attached to a staple driven in between two huge blocks of stone.

It was short, indeed.

It was just long enough to enable him to reach a stone bench that was fixed to the wall, and that was all.

As soon as he noticed this bench, Jack resolved to sit down upon it, for, as he stood, the weight of the fetters distressed him sadly.

It was not without some difficulty, however, that Jack carried out his intentions.

All his limbs ached, and the weight of the irons caused him great torture when he attempted to move.

When he at length sat down he experienced a great feeling of relief, though he soon found that if he remained long in one position his limbs got cramped.

Deep and bitter curses against his foe came from his lips continually, as his eyes roamed constantly and restlessly over the four walls of the cell.

He resolved to think no more of Edgworth Bess.

He made up his mind that he would banish her entirely from his thoughts, and to do so the more effectually he occupied himself with other reflections.

He thought of Blueskin, and speculated upon his fate, which he could not help thinking was very doubtful.

All he knew about his comrade was, that he had only had a very short start of his pursuers, who, as his own case exemplified, were men who were determined to effect their purpose.

Blueskin might have escaped, and he might have been taken prisoner; about the latter, however, he had heard nothing—not even the remotest allusion had fallen from the lips of either the Bow Street runners or the Governor of Newgate, and so he indulged himself with the hope that he had succeeded in getting off.

But this was very uncertain.

Had Blueskin, however, been so fortunate as to elude his foes, Jack doubted not that he would lose no time in taking prompt and efficient measures to aid his own escape.

When he reached this point in his reflection he paused and sighed, for he no longer felt the powerful impulse to urge him on that had previously existed.

Insensibly then his thoughts came round to the original point from which they had started.

It was in vain he resolved to forget the young girl whose companion he had so long been.

Suddenly he was interrupted.

The sound of footsteps in the corridor without smote upon his ears.

Nearer and nearer they came until at length they paused opposite the cell door.

Curiously and expectantly he turned his eyes towards it, much wondering who it was that had come to pay him this early visit.

There was something unusual in it, for he had not been an inmate of the cell above an hour.

With usual deliberation the fastenings on the outside were withdrawn, and the door itself cautiously opened.

To Jack's astonishment, no other than his old enemy, Mr. Noakes, the Governor of the prison, came in.

Jack had raised his head to look, but now, when he saw who it was, he covered his face with his hands again, and bowed his head upon his knees.

He determined to take no notice, nor did he until the Governor approached and touched him.

Then he shrank back as he would from the contact of some loathsome or venomous reptile.

We have already stated the particulars of the visit, and also made the reader acquainted with Mr. Noakes's motive for making it.

When he left the cell, Jack again raised his head.

He had now fresh food for reflection.

He puzzled his brains to think of the motive which had caused the Governor to make this visit.

But he could arrive at no conclusion.

He was thoroughly baffled and bewildered.

That there was something behind it he felt confident, but what he was quite at a loss to think.

A thousand strange thoughts crowded into his brain, but none of them furnished him with the least clue as to the meaning of the Governor's conduct.

At length, after perplexing his brain for a long time, he gave up the attempt in despair.

Once more he assumed his old attitude, and his thoughts reverted to Edgworth Bess.

He did so unconsciously, but the sad reflections which filled his mind completely unnerved him.

But he was destined to be soon aroused from these thoughts.

He was destined to be interrupted.

Again came the sound of footsteps, but this time they reached his ears with greater distinctness than before.

He listened attentively.

Then he became aware that on the present occasion two persons instead of one were approaching.

"Can it be possible," muttered Jack to himself, "that I am going to have more visitors? Oh dear no, such an idea is ridiculous and impossible."

Nevertheless, although he uttered these words, he continued to listen to the approaching footsteps.

They passed opposite his door, and he heard the fastenings removed.

What could be the meaning of this?

Was it the intention of his foes not to allow him any rest or repose whatever?



JONATHAN WILD AND THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE EXULT OVER THE MISERY OF JACK SHEPPARD.

Was his solitude to be thus continually broken in upon?

He gnashed his teeth in impotent rage as he heard the murmuring of voices outside and the rattling of the key in the lock.

No sooner, however, was the bolt forced back than the door was thrown open with such violence that it struck against the wall.

A figure rushed in and paused before the prisoner.

It was a short, bulky figure.

Jack cast but one glance upon it.

That, however, was quite enough.

It was Jonathan Wild.

His first impulse was to spring to his feet and clutch his persecutor by the throat, and hold him until he was strangled.

He did attempt to start up, but his fetters held him down.

He had forgotten them, and the suddenness with which he attempted to rise gave him great pain.

No. 72.—BLUESKIN.

A mocking laugh came from Jonathan Wild's lips.

"Ha, ha! my pretty bird!" he said, "your wings are clipped, are they? You find it rather difficult to fly now, don't you? Ha, ha! And Jack Sheppard has really got back to his old quarters at last!"

It was not so much the words themselves that enraged Jack.

It was the thought of the person by whom they were spoken, and the taunting tone in which they were uttered.

Jack was like a chained tiger, and Wild was well aware that he was safely out of his reach.

The Governor of Newgate, too, having with superfluous caution closed and secured the person by whom they were spoken, and the taunting tone in which they were uttered.

Jack was like a chained tiger, and Wild was well aware that he was safely out of his reach.

He linked his arm in Jonathan Wild's, and the pair stood gloating over their victim, who now seemed wholly in their power.

What power could save him when he had not even the spirit to try to save himself?

It was perhaps as well that the heavy chain checked Jack when he first attempted to rise.

Nothing would have pleased Wild so much as to be able to work him up to the pitch of rage.

Such, indeed, was one of his motives for visiting the cell.

Jack thought of this, and resolved to baulk the thief-taker and the Governor of their anticipated pleasure.

He assumed a moody aspect, and behaved as though he was totally unconscious of their presence there.

This was a course of action that was above all others most exasperating to Jonathan Wild.

He wanted to make his victim frantic.

But without he adopted some further means than he had yet attempted, there remained no hope of him being able to succeed in his object.

Jack remained immovable.

Jonathan then tried the effect of exasperating his victim by talking at him.

He therefore addressed the Governor tauntingly, and Jack could not avoid hearing every word.

His hot blood boiled, but still he retained perfect command over himself.

Wild felt the necessity of changing his tactics.

He was resolved to carry out his intention, and the resistance he met with only served to make him more determined.

He could not bear the thought of Jack obtaining the victory over him.

"Why, Jack," he said, "can this indeed be you? Ha, ha! Well, I must say that the air of Newgate has made a remarkable alteration in you. Why, you do not seem the same? Noakes, my friend!" he added, turning to the Governor, "you have surely made some mistake? This contemptible, paltry, chicken-hearted fellow, who does not seem to have a word to say for himself, cannot possibly be the celebrated Jack Sheppard? I am sure there is some mistake."

Mr. Noakes shrugged his shoulders.

Jack took no more notice than if not a word had been spoken.

"I am sorry this is not the right man, Noakes?" continued Wild. "If it had been the celebrated Jack Sheppard, I have some information for him which he would gladly give his ears to know—that he would."

Still Jack maintained command over himself, though his heart beat wildly as Jonathan spoke.

He seemed to have some dim idea of what was about to be said.

And yet he scarcely believed it.

A word from him would have set his mind at rest, but he resolved not to allow his old foe to obtain even such a partial triumph over him as that.

So, although it cost him a tremendous effort, he did not move or speak, or betray in any way that he had heard what had just been said.

"I am sorry," said Wild, "to find the right Jack Sheppard is not here; the news I had was so very important."

"Indeed!" said the Governor, with an air of pretended interest, for he fully understood what Wild meant. "Is it of such very great importance?"

"Well, it is to Jack Sheppard."

"Oh, indeed! What might be the nature of it?"

"It can do no harm to say."

"Certainly not."

Jonathan Wild glanced at Jack again, and he had to grind his teeth to keep down the curse which came to his lips when he found he had not apparently succeeded in arousing his victim in the least.

But he fancied he possessed the power to arouse him.

"The information I had to give," he said, in low guttural tones, "concerned a young girl."

"A young girl?" said the Governor, like an echo.

"Yes, a young girl."

Oh, how Jack Sheppard's heart bounded when he heard these words.

His brain seemed to fill with blood, and he started slightly.

The movement—trifling as it was—did not escape the lynx-like glance of Jonathan Wild.

He knew that he had touched upon a tender point, and if Jack withstood this proof, he should despair of achieving his purpose.

"What young girl?" asked the Governor.

"Well, one that you have no doubt heard of, and one in whom Jack Sheppard feels the greatest possible interest, I believe."

"Oh, indeed! then I presume you allude to——"

The Governor purposely left his sentence unfinished, in order that his friend, the thief-taker, might complete it for him.

"I allude to the young girl called Edgworth Bess."

Jonathan spoke the words as slowly as possible, and with half-closed eyes gazed steadfastly upon Jack, as he pronounced the name.

But he was deceived.

Its pronunciation did not make that effect which he thought it would.

The prisoner did not even start.

The reason was this.

With a species of intuition, Jack divined who was the young girl alluded to.

Therefore, his first surprise over, he schooled himself to bear with immobility the mention of her name.

Outwardly he succeeded, but his mind was in a terrible state of agitation.

The reader will have no difficulty in believing this when he remembers the tenor of Jack's reflections.

Wild now was furious.

He resolved to try his prisoner to the utmost, and under the dominancy of this feeling, said things which in cooler moments he would have kept locked fast within his bosom.

He felt inclined, however, to sacrifice a great deal rather than avow himself defeated.

As for Jack, he clenched his teeth tightly to keep in the words which struggled to escape his lips, and could but Jonathan Wild have fully realized the state of torment that his mind was then in, he would have left the cell at that moment.

It will be seen, however, how he committed himself, and the important events that occurred in consequence.

CHAPTER CCCLIII.

JONATHAN WILD'S COMMUNICATION PRODUCES AN UNEXPECTED EFFECT UPON JACK SHEPPARD.

"JACK SHEPPARD!" said Jonathan Wild, at length addressing himself to the prisoner direct, "Jack Sheppard, I say! Look up!"

Jack obeyed.

He could not refrain from doing so.

He fixed his eyes keenly upon his tormentor.

But he did not speak.

"What change can have come over you, I know not!" continued Wild, "and were it not that I had such good acquaintance with your features as I have, I should really feel disposed to entertain the doubt that some mistake had been made, and that you were really not Jack Sheppard. But your countenance is one which I could never mistake. Listen to me! I have something to tell you."

Jonathan paused in the hope that Jack would say something.

But he was disappointed.

Nevertheless, he continued:

"I have something to tell you about that girl—about Edgworth Bess as she is called—though you know her right name well enough. I have something to say to you about her—something that it concerns you to know—something that you would give your right hand to ascertain."

Poor Jack made no other reply than to clench his teeth together with still greater tightness.

Not unnaturally, he came to the conclusion that the news Wild had to tell him in some way concerned the young nobleman with whom he had been told Edgworth Bess had left the house in Spring Gardens.

The reader must not forget the terrible misapprehension under which Jack laboured.

He knew nothing of the conversation which had taken place in the snow-covered street between the young girl and her deliverer.

Still less did he surmise its termination.

Jack's thoughts upon this point had been terrible enough, and now he imagined he was about to receive some horrible confirmation of them.

"Don't you want to hear what I have to tell you?" asked Wild.

Even this question met with no reply.

"You may think to aggravate me by keeping silent like this," said the thief-taker, whose rage began rapidly to get the master of him. "You may think to aggravate me, but I tell you, once for all, you will not succeed in doing so. You would like to hear what I have got to tell you, and it is just for this reason that I will make you know it. You cannot refuse to listen. Although you would fain make me believe the contrary, I can tell you are eager to hear me speak. Well, then, Jack Sheppard, you are a prisoner—a hopeless prisoner! You have escaped from Newgate twice, but do not think that you will perform such an unparalleled feat a third time. No, no! you are safe! The best of precautions have been taken, for the Governor feels that his situation now depends upon his being able to keep you safely."

"You won't escape this time," said the Governor, confidently, as he thought of his capital scheme. "I will answer for that!"

"If I thought," continued Wild, "that there was the remotest possibility of your recovering your liberty, I would bite my tongue off rather than tell you what I am about to say! But you are safe, and so I do not fear; and it will serve to make your confinement more bitter than it has already proved—and that is bitter enough, if I may judge by the change in your demeanour. But I will increase its bitterness tenfold."

No words could possibly portray the tone of malevolence in which Wild spoke.

He seemed scarcely human.

Jack shuddered, for he felt that now he would no longer have the relief of refusing to believe all that his heart prompted.

"You may shudder, Jack, but you will shudder more when I have spoken! I tell you, that Edgworth Bess—do you hear me?—I tell you, Edgworth Bess, last night, was seen flying like a maniac through the streets of Westminster. What may have occurred to cause her madness, I shall leave you to conjecture. She flew to the river bank, mounted upon a barge, and sprang into the Thames!" Jack Sheppard uttered an inarticulate cry.

The intelligence which he just heard was so totally different to what he had expected, that it destroyed his self-command.

Perceiving the effect he had already produced, Jonathan Wild proceeded with more candour than prudence, to relate what had further taken place.

By doing so, he hoped to make the prisoner doubly wretched.

Little did he dream how different would be the effect which his communication caused.

"She committed suicide, Jack—think of that! What should you imagine drove her to it? What is it that drives young girls to make a mad and desperate plunge into the muddy river—what is it Jack? Answer me that?"

A groan was Jonathan's only response.

This news overwhelmed Jack completely.

Edgworth Bess dead—drowned?

The bare idea was horrible!

He was totally unprepared to hear of her death!

Such a thing seemed impossible, for he had never contemplated the occurrence of such an event.

And now, if Jonathan Wild had only possessed a little prudence, he would have stopped here and said no more.

But, encouraged by the effect which he had already produced, he resolved to heighten it if possible.

He fancied, and not without a certain amount of probability, that what he had further to tell Jack concerning her, was far worse than death.

And in this he was quite correct; but, with a blindness of which one could scarcely fancy him guilty, he omitted to take into his calculations the change which this communication would make in Jack's whole deportment.

While he thought Edgworth Bess was dead, he would have had no incentive to struggle to avoid the fate which impended over him.

But if he knew she lived, he would fight to the last.

It may be that Wild thought of this, and relied upon the security with which he would be kept a prisoner.

His revenge would feel better satisfied if Jack was

taken to Tyburn fighting fruitlessly to the last, than if he went there inanimately, as some did.

But, be the cause what it will, Jonathan Wild went on. "She is not dead, Jack!" he said. "She jumped into the river with the intention of committing the crime of self-destruction, but she was not allowed to carry out her purpose. She was rescued and taken to a certain place, which there is no need for me to mention. She had immediate medical attention, and has recovered. She is weak, but a few days will set that all right. One word more, Jack, and then I have told you all. She is my prisoner! Do you understand that? She is my prisoner, and has no power to escape! You are here, and cannot move a finger in her behalf, and such a close hunt is being made for Blueskin, that he will have quite enough to do to save himself from capture!"

Jack's eyes glittered.

While his foe spoke, he felt that that indomitable energy, which he fancied he had lost, return to him with redoubled force.

No longer did the fetters seem to weigh him down!

He felt as though he could have risen to his feet, without being sensible of their weight.

But he remained immovable, waiting with undisguised impatience and anxiety to what Wild had to say.

The thief-taker continued:

"You see, then, Jack, that I am fully master of the situation. You cannot stir; Mr. Noakes will pledge his head at any moment that you are safe, and will not make your escape. From you, therefore, I have nothing further to fear in the shape of interference. Then, as for Blueskin, ere long he will be in the same delightful position as yourself, for he cannot long elude the close search which is being made after him. Then, you see, I have Edgworth Bess all to myself! In a few days I am convinced she will be of age, and then all will be well. Don't grind your teeth, Jack! Do that when I am gone. I will give you further cause, if you like. I have told you so far, and, as I feel I am talking, as it were, with a dead man, I don't mind talking for a little more. Well, then, I have got possession of all the papers necessary to prove who Edgworth Bess really is. They are in my house—safe! What do you think of that? Jack, through your opposition, I have had a difficult game to play; but I have won—won completely. You have lost, Jack, and you will have to pay the penalty of losing!"

This last speech roused Jack completely.

He no longer felt like the same being.

He spoke.

"I thank you, Jonathan Wild," he said, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you have just told me. Your words have driven away the blackest despair that ever filled my breast, and in its place you have put hope. Jonathan Wild, the game is not yet won. You may think you have the best cards in your hands; but wait—wait—until the game is quite played out, then we shall see whether you have won or not!"

"That sounds like Jack Sheppard!" said the thief-taker, with a derisive grin. "I know you now, but I did not recognise you before. Fancy what you like! Cheat yourself into the hope that you are not defeated! Continue to do so to the last, and then your disappointment will be all the greater. Ha, ha! Jack, we shall see!"

"We shall!" returned Jack.

"We shall see you hanging on Tyburn Tree!"

"Don't make too sure of that! I tell you that your neck is destined for the hangman's rope; and, whether I live to see it placed around it I care not, but I know the event will come sooner or later."

Jonathan Wild turned white with passion, and trembled.

There had always been a disagreeable conviction in his mind that, at some day or other, he would have to pay the just debt of his iniquities, and these words, spoken by Jack in so confident a tone, made a deeper impression upon him than he would have acknowledged even to himself.

Recovering himself with a palpable effort, he said:

"I heed not your empty words—your foolish predictions!"

"You cannot heed them less than I do yours! I tell you again, the game is not yet played, and it yet remains to be seen who will be the winner!"

"Pho—pho!"

"You may say 'pho—pho,' Jonathan Wild, but, in

your heart, you acknowledge the truth of what I say. Jonathan Wild, beware of me, for the day will come when I shall make you suffer dearly for all that you have heaped upon my head!"

"This is glorious, Jack!" said Wild. "This is the treat I promised myself when I came to pay you this visit, though at one time I feared I should be doomed to disappointment. But in this, as in all things else, I have succeeded, though, for a time, circumstances went against me. Ha, ha! Jack, you are doomed! Beat your wings against the stone walls as much as you like—the more, the better I shall be pleased; you will break your wings, not the stone walls! And then, in a very little while, Jack, I shall have—ha, ha!—the greatest treat in the world—to me the treat I have been waiting for so long and which I never despaired of having. The treat of seeing you swing at Tyburn!"

"Rail on, Jonathan Wild, I pay no heed to your present words; I think only of what you told me such a little while ago—that is all I want to think of. Jonathan Wild, I thank you heartily for your visit!"

"You think to escape, do you, my lawcock? Go on—try it! I should feel more satisfied, than that if you were to go to Tyburn unresistingly!"

"I shall say nothing as to my intentions, Jonathan Wild."

"There is no need for you to do so; but come, Mr. Noakes, I think we have been here long enough! If you recollect, I have some other important business to perform?"

"You have, Mr. Wild, and I humbly think that it is quite time you set about it."

"It is!—it is! Jack, my boy! I am going to a particular friend of mine—a very particular friend. He fills the very important post of Secretary of State for the Home Department. Ha, ha! How funny—isn't it?"

"If he treats you as you deserve he will have you kicked out of his house by his footman!"

"Ha, ha! He knows better than that! I am going to see him on your account, Jack—entirely on your account. Isn't that kind of me? I am going to see whether your execution cannot take place with the least possible delay. I am going to try whether the warrant against you—which is now lodged in Mr. Noakes's possession, and has been ever since your former escape—will not answer without the delay of drawing up a fresh one. Ha, ha! I'm off, Jack! I'm off! Good bye! Keep your spirits up! The Secretary of State will listen to my arguments, I know. Ha, ha! Good bye, Jack, for the present! I'll come back and let you know how I get on!"

CHAPTER CCCLIV.

JACK SHEPPARD IS PUZZLED BY THE GOVERNOR'S FREQUENT VISITS TO HIS CELL.

WHILE Jonathan Wild was giving utterance to this highly-factious speech, his friend, the Governor, opened the cell door.

The thief-taker followed him, and spoke the last words as he was in the act of crossing the threshold.

Mr. Noakes slammed the door and carefully fastened it.

With burning eyes Jack watched their every movement, and when his foes had fairly disappeared, he, despite the weight of his fetters, sprang suddenly to his feet.

He drew himself up to his full height and shook his fist in a menacing manner at the door.

"I shall live to have my revenge upon you both!" he said. "I shall live to have my revenge upon you both! You may think that the hour of your triumph is close at hand, but you are deceived—deceived! Something within my bosom tells me that I shall be revenged upon you all!"

After this the gust of his passion grew less, and he sank back upon his seat.

But the terrible dejection which we have described as being produced by his sad thoughts, no longer remained.

He held his head up bravely and defiantly.

"Jonathan Wild!" he said at length, in a muttering voice, "I thank you for this visit. You little dream of the effect which your words have had upon me! Doubtless you calculate upon plunging me still deeper in despair, but you have failed—failed utterly and completely. I feel

that all my old energy has come back to me! I will escape—escape!"

He glanced around him as he spoke.

The blank stone walls which seemed so strong and massive, were enough to crush out the least hope of escape.

But Jack Sheppard was not dismayed by their appearance.

He had proved more than once that it was quite possible to break out of Newgate—and why should he not succeed this time?

"I will be free," he continued, "and that before I am many hours older! If I remain here, with my brain in such a whirl as it is now, I shall assuredly go mad! What can be the meaning of Jonathan Wild's communication, is it true or false? True, I think! Good heavens! His words prove how much injustice I have done the poor girl! How could I have suspected her of such an act so contrary to her nature? But this attempt at suicide! What am I to think of it? Oh, my poor brain! I feel as if I was going mad!"

The unhappy prisoner clasped his head tightly with his hands as he spoke.

Of a truth were his reflections maddening and perplexing to a degree.

By exercising many efforts, however, he grew calmer.

"Something terrible must have happened to her," he continued, "or she would not have taken that leap into the river! And then to think that after she had done so, she should fall into the power of the villainous thief-taker! And I here—caged, unable to raise a finger in her behalf! But this state of things shall not continue long—I am determined!"

He paused again, for a thought had struck him.

He found he had hit upon a means by which his liberation could be effected.

"Blueskin!" he said, pursuing this fresh chain of thought. "I want Blueskin's help, but I sadly fear he is powerless to assist me! Now that I am as he thinks secure, Wild will devote all his energies to his capture, and Blueskin will have much trouble to escape him. Moreover he will be anxious about me, for he knows my whereabouts. He will doubtless try to liberate me, and that will give Jonathan a better chance of success! I must rely upon myself. Much as I should like to have his assistance—invaluable as it would be to me—I must not think of it. I must depend entirely upon my own exertions—perhaps that will be better. Let me think—let me think!"

Once more did Jack Sheppard allow his head to rest between his hands, but it was with a far different feeling.

He was now at work to follow out the thought which at first occurred to him.

But it seemed nothing short of madness for a youth, a stripling, like he was, burdened with fetters that weighed twice as much as he did, and which had been riveted upon him with more than usual care!

Then the cell, certainly the strongest in the whole prison of Newgate.

How could he hope, unprovided with tools, as he was, first to free himself from the galling fetters, and then to force his way out of that strong cell.

But even when he had done this, how many and formidable obstacles intervened between him and freedom.

Such obstacles which would appal the stoutest heart by their very insurmountableness.

Had Jack endeavoured to look at all his difficulties at once, he would doubtless have been overwhelmed by their magnitude.

As it was, however, he looked at them one at a time, and scarcely even so, for he troubled himself about little more than how to get rid of his fetters.

When he had done this he thought there would be time enough to think about the next thing to be done.

How to get out of his fetters was a most serious problem, and while he still sat pondering over its solution, he was again aroused by hearing the fastenings of his door undone.

He looked up, and an exclamation of anger came from his lips.

This perpetual interruption vexed him exceedingly.

He much wondered who it was that was coming now.

A wild hope that it might be Blueskin sprang into his mind, but he dismissed it instantly.

To his chagrin, and to his astonishment too, the Governor of Newgate appeared.

He came just inside the cell, and looking at Jack, said: "Oh, it's all right!" and then departed.

Of course the reader will be able to comprehend the meaning of this visit.

To them it will be simple enough, but not so to Jack.

He sat gazing at the door, after the Governor had disappeared, for some moments in silence.

He was perplexed.

"What's all right?" he asked, at length.

He found himself unable to reply, though he cudged his brains well for an answer.

"There's something up!" he remarked. "I am sure there is, but what, puzzles me to tell? Old Noakes has got some scheme into his head. I wonder what it means?"

With all his wondering, however, Jack could not get any nearer to a solution of his difficulty.

He now recollected that he had received no less than three visits, and yet he had not been an inmate of the cell for more than six hours.

This seemed strange.

There was some deep motive in this excessive attention, he was convinced of that, but with all his cleverness he could not divine it.

But he now found it quite impossible to concentrate his thoughts upon how he should get out of his fetters as he had before.

Do what he would, his thoughts continually reverted to Mr. Noakes's repeated visits, and speculations as to the cause of them.

In this manner about two more hours passed.

It will be remembered that Mr. Noakes made up his mind to visit his prisoner every two hours without fail.

At the end of that time, therefore, he came.

But he began to find this a terrible trouble, and already felt almost inclined to depute the service to one of his subordinates.

Upon the occasion of this fourth visit, he went muttering and cursing all the way from the vestibule to the door of the cell.

He opened the door, as he had done before, and just peeped in.

He saw Jack still sitting in the same position.

As on the former occasion, the Governor said, "All right!" and closed the door.

It would be hard to say which feeling was uppermost in Jack's mind, vexation or curiosity.

Vexation at being thus continually interrupted, and curiosity to know why the Governor took the trouble to poke his head into the cell at such frequent intervals.

"I have it!" he cried, at length, "I am sure I understand it now! How was it I did not think of it before? Of course that must be it—the Governor said he would take care I did not escape, and this is the notable scheme he has hit upon to prevent me. He will come here as often as he can to look at me, so that I should not have a chance to do so much between the times when he comes! That is it! That is the scheme! It is a good one, I confess, but I will set to work and try to get the better of him, and I doubt not I shall succeed."

Although Jack spoke thus confidently, he was, nevertheless, rather uneasy.

He saw that, if Mr. Noakes continued to carry out his intention, these frequent visits would prevent him doing anything without being discovered.

Then to prevent these visits being paid, was certainly not in Jack's power.

He could not by any possibility exercise the least control over the Governor's actions.

In these visits, however, Jack fancied he could detect the cunning hand of the thief-taker, but here he was in error.

It disconcerted him more and more as he continued to think upon it.

He could not help owning that this continual supervision was a more effectual means of keeping him a prisoner than the strongest cells and the heaviest fetters.

What was to be done?

How was he to escape?

If he made any attempt at freedom, before he had been at work two hours he would be detected.

Then, to hope to be able to escape altogether from New-

gate in such a short space of time as that was a feat that even Jack Sheppard was compelled to admit was impossible.

Yet these hindrances and impediments, far from abasing his spirits, had a contrary effect.

He felt that there was a trial of strength between himself and the Governor and Jonathan Wild.

Which would be the victor?

He resolved not to submit without a struggle, and having come to this determination, he returned to his old idea and intention—namely, to free himself from his fetters.

They weighed upon his limbs, and appeared to weigh down his spirits.

Besides, ere long the night would come, and the thought of remaining all those hours with the fetters upon him was torture.

But in what way was he to free himself from them.

The turnkeys had taken care not to leave a single article of any description in his pockets.

He had no tools to effect his purpose save his hands, and what assistance would they be to him in a case like this.

None.

He could not hope to again perform the feat of drawing the handcuffs off his wrists, for those he now had on fitted so tightly as almost to stop the circulation of the blood.

The daylight was fading, and Jack anxiously and despairingly glanced round his cell in the vague expectation of being able to see something that would be of service to him.

But in vain.

Nothing but the stone walls met his eager and inquiring glance.

Suddenly, his quick, keen eye rested upon a small object.

So small was it that it was no wonder he had not seen it before.

The wonder was that he had seen it at all.

Sticking in the wall not very far from where he sat was a nail.

Yes—a nail.

It was a small one, and driven into the mortar between the stones until it was almost buried.

The head and a very small portion of the shank alone remained in sight.

How Jack's heart bounded when he saw that nail.

It would answer the very purpose he required.

Could he reach it?

He was almost afraid to try, lest it should prove to be out of his reach.

At length he rose to his feet, and crept along towards the nail.

As he feared, he could not reach it.

He made several vain attempts.

It was almost within reach of his hand, but not quite.

Two inches more would have enabled him to touch it; but his chain was unelastic—it would not stretch.

Still he tugged and tried, but all in vain.

His fingers were so close to the nail that they almost touched it, but being, as it was, just out of his reach, it might as well have been on the opposite side of the cell, or in any other inaccessible place.

No words can express the state of Jack's mind at this disappointment.

The very thing that he required—the article that would have enabled him, no doubt, to pick the lock of his fetters was there—in his sight, but out of his reach.

Oh, how he tugged at the chain, straining himself uselessly and vainly! It would not yield in the least.

He was thus engaged when he heard footsteps again approaching his cell, and, with an ejaculation of anger and vexation, he resumed his former attitude.

CHAPTER CCCLV.

EDGEMOUTH BESS RESOLVES TO ESCAPE FROM THE PUBLIC-HOUSE ON THE RIVER-SIDE.

THE perilous position of Jack Sheppard has caused us to devote the whole of our attention to a relation of his various proceedings, and, as a matter of course, while doing so, we have neglected others in whom it is hoped the reader feels an almost equal interest.

It is necessary now, however, in order that proceeding

events may be properly understood, that we should leave Jack Sheppard for a short time in his dungeon, while we take a glance at Edgworth Bess.

Poor girl, it seemed as though she was destined to know no friends.

Even the landlady of the Prince of Wales inn was her enemy, for was she not devoted to the interests of Jonathan Wild?

Whether she served him voluntarily or compulsorily mattered little, since the ultimate result was just the same.

She had everything to fear from this woman.

There was no hope that she would be able to persuade her to assist her to escape from her relentless persecutor.

Mrs. Pickman would have turned a deaf ear to all such entreaties.

And yet one good thing followed.

Had it not been for the fear she entertained of the villainous thief-taker, Edgworth Bess would not have received the attention she now did.

She might even have been maltreated.

Now, it was the policy of the landlady to see that she had the best of attendance, and, indeed, that everything was done that was in any way calculated to restore her to a better state of health.

The surgeon who had been called in understood in a moment the nature of her malady, and prescribed for her accordingly.

She rapidly got better.

Her brain was at first in a state of sad confusion.

A long time elapsed before she was able to recollect the last event which had happened to her.

Her remembrance was baffled.

By starting from one point, however,—her escape from the house in Spring Gardens—she was able to call to mind one after another, the different incidents which had befallen her until she arrived at the period when the forewoman at the shroudmaker's proclaimed who she was, and stated, in opprobrious terms, the nature of her connection with Jack Sheppard.

She had an indistinct recollection of flying from that place at headlong speed, but after that came a blank, and, in spite of all her efforts, she could not fill it up.

The next thing she recollected, after her flight, was waking up and finding herself in bed.

But where?

In what house was she?

How had she been brought there?—and when?

These, and a thousand other important and unanswerable questions which would naturally suggest themselves, perplexed her brain, until, in sheer despair, she was forced to give up the attempt.

It was not long after this that she heard the door of her bed-chamber unlocked.

This alone was an unpleasant circumstance, since it showed her that she was a prisoner.

For what reason had she been locked in that room.

Her heart turned as cold as ice within her bosom as she thought that she had at length been so unfortunate as to fall into the power of the villainous thief-taker.

This impression came so strongly upon her as almost to amount to conviction.

She almost fainted.

The approach of someone to her bedside aroused her.

She recovered herself, and looked to see who it was, dreading all the time that her eyes would fall upon the hideous countenance of the thief-taker.

But she was mistaken, and a sigh of relief came from her lips when she saw that the person who had entered was a female.

But whatever satisfaction she might have felt quickly disappeared when, at a second glance, she noted the expression of this woman's countenance.

It was Mrs. Pickman, the landlady.

Edgworth Bess had had many bitter lessons of experience, and now she could tell at a glance that this woman was an enemy.

It was proclaimed by every feature in her physiognomy.

The poor heiress sighed.

"Oh! you have woke up at last, have you?" said Mrs. Pickman, as soon as Edgworth Bess turned her eyes full upon her—"you have woke up? And a nice pretty baggage you must be to come into a decent woman's

house as you have come into mine! I should be ashamed of myself, that I should!"

Edgworth Bess looked up not a little surprised at this harangue.

She was at a loss to understand it, and she gazed with a vacant expression into Mrs. Pickman's face.

That individual now had time to come to her senses.

In speaking as she had, she had only obeyed the instincts of her own evil heart, but directly she had spoken she was alarmed for the consequences of what she had said.

She had a most exaggerated idea of the powers of Jonathan Wild.

She believed him to have more than human power, and she could not tell at what moment he might unexpectedly present himself at her elbow.

Her contrition for what she had said was only brought about by the fear that her words might, by some unlucky possibility, be overheard by the thief-taker.

Edgworth Bess, perceiving her sudden silence, and being quite at a loss to account for it, asked her a multitude of questions respecting herself, and entreated her to give some explanation of the words she had first uttered.

But Mrs. Pickman was now upon her guard, and she replied to all by maintaining a resolute silence.

Seeing, indeed, that her prisoner was quite safe, and much better, she turned to leave the room, since she had only come to satisfy herself that she had not escaped.

She was pleased to discover the signs of such a marked improvement, because it promised that she would be all the sooner relieved of her charge.

Glad indeed would she be when Jonathan Wild removed her to his own keeping.

She could scarcely sleep at night now for thinking of the penalty she would incur should her prisoner disappear.

Now that she was conscious, extra vigilance would be required.

And so, with an uneasy mind, she descended the stairs, and when she entered the bar she soiced herself with a drop of something to drive away care.

As soon as she had left the room, Edgworth Bess sat up in bed.

She heard the landlady lock the door after her, and descend the stairs with a deliberate tread.

The poor girl was much better.

The rest she had had, the medicine and food which had been given her, had all conspired in a most beneficial manner.

She felt herself stronger and better than she had been for a long time past, and naturally enough the first idea that was suggested to her mind was to attempt to escape from her prison, for such that room, to all intents and purposes, really was.

The impression that she was again in Jonathan Wild's power grew stronger and stronger.

A voice seemed to ring in her ears and urge her to escape—to escape while yet she had an opportunity of doing so.

A few minutes were passed in earnest deliberation, and then the poor girl arose.

Attiring herself quickly, she crept towards the window.

It was twilight, but darkness was fast creeping over all things.

Surely, she thought, all things are propitious for the attempt.

She resolved, however, not to try to escape until night had fairly come.

She had not long to wait; and the time that elapsed, she occupied in noting the position of the different objects that she could see.

The window of the room in which she was confined overlooked the Thames.

Beneath her was a small yard, filled with litter and rubbish of every possible description.

This yard was divided by the muddy bank of the river by a low wall.

This was an obstacle which she was quite certain she should be able to surmount, and when that was done, she thought further flight would be comparatively easy.

The thing would be to reach the yard.

In this feat she did not perceive anything very difficult. The room was on the first floor, and the height of the chamber beneath was not great.

If she could get through the window and lower herself

down until she hung by the grasp of her fingers upon the sill, she thought she could drop the remainder of the distance, without running the risk of doing herself the slightest injury.

A dozen steps would take her to the wall, and then she would be free.

This prospect was such a delightful one that she could scarcely control her impatience sufficiently to wait for darkness to come.

With a great effort she did so, and kept continually counting the chances she had of success.

The more she thought upon the matter, the more feasible did the whole scheme seem.

At last the wished-for darkness came.

It was increased by a thick, disagreeable fog, which arose from the surface of the river, and spread quickly over the land that adjoined its banks.

All this inspired the poor girl with additional hope that she should be able to make her escape.

She resolved to make the attempt without further delay.

She had already ascertained that she could throw the window open noiselessly, and she did so.

A chill, raw, damp air rushed into the apartment.

She shivered as she felt its influence.

Nerving herself to the task which lay before her, she mounted on to the window-sill, and gradually lowered herself through the casement until she hung out the full length of her arms.

Then she let go her hold.

She had a distance of less than two feet to fall, consequently she reached the ground unhurt.

Scarcely had she done so when she was startled by the sudden opening of a door somewhere close at hand.

Paralysed with fear, and doubting not that her attempt at escape had already been discovered, she sank down on to the stones, with which the yard was paved, unable to move or speak.

A stream of bright light issued from the open door, and the form of a man appeared at it.

This Bess saw as she crouched upon the ground.

The door was closed again with considerable violence, and she could hear the footsteps of the man approaching the spot upon which she lay.

Oh, how she wished for the power to rise and fly, and attempt at least to make her escape.

But she could not.

Her body was no longer obedient to her will—she was like one under the dominion of some fascinating spell.

It was fortunate that she did not move.

The man passed her.

He did not see her, evidently, nor was he on the look out for her.

With straining eyes Bess watched his retreating figure.

As he receded, the fog made his form appear to grow to giant-like proportions, until at length he faded away altogether.

The next sound she heard was the opening of a door, and the sound came from the direction the man had taken.

He had gone towards the low wall which Edgworth Bess had noticed, and over which she thought to climb.

It seemed as though she would be spared the necessity of doing this.

Revived by this prospect, and encouraged by the ease with which she had avoided this first danger, she slowly rose, and with cautious movements, followed, as well as she was able in the footsteps of the man.

In a little while she reached the wall, and here she paused a little while to listen.

All was still.

The man had evidently taken his departure.

All that remained for her to do was to find the door through which he had unquestionably gone.

She commenced her search.

She was unable to find what she sought.

Just as she was about to give up the attempt in despair, her hand encountered woodwork.

She could tell by the difference of the feel.

The next moment she touched the latch.

Her heart beat so violently that she could not raise it, so fearful was she that she should find it otherwise secured.

At length she found strength.

She raised the latch easily enough, and pressed against the door.

A sigh of disappointment, almost a groan, came from her lips.

It was as immovable as a rock.

Her worst fears were realised.

Unconsciously, as she released the latch, she pulled the door towards her.

To her astonishment and delight it gave way.

The door opened inwardly, and not outwardly, and she ought to have pulled, not pushed.

The suddenness with which she made this discovery, almost overcame her.

It was too much happiness.

Summoning once more her fleeting spirits and failing strength, she pushed the door further open.

Again she listened.

Reassured by the silence which still prevailed, she glided out into the darkness like a spirit.

CHAPTER CCCLVI.

EDGWORTH BESS IS CAPTURED AND TAKEN TO WILD'S HOUSE IN NEWGATE STREET.

So far all was well, and drawing the brightest auguries from the unhoped-for success which had attended upon her efforts, the poor girl drew her breath in short fluttering gasps, and bounded forward with all the speed she could make.

She was free, she told herself—free—free! Free from that dreadful house, where she was wholly in Wild's power.

The mist baffled her, but she hastened onward.

Suddenly she started, and uttered a faint scream.

A gruff voice had cried out for her to stop.

Instead, however, of obeying this unwelcome mandate, she hastened on.

But despair was about her heart.

She could hear rapid footsteps behind her, and then she felt someone grasp her tightly.

"Quietly, my beauty!" he said. "Quietly—quietly! Don't go so fast!"

The terrified girl struggled frantically to get free.

In vain.

The grasp in which she was held was one that would have required ten times her strength to shake off.

She was ready to swoon with terror.

Who could have intercepted her, and what could have been the motive of the interception.

It was not Jonathan Wild who had seized her, nor was Jonathan Wild the man who had pursued her, and who now just arrived upon the scene.

She could tell this because she had heard both men speak, and she was too familiar with the thief-taker's voice to make any mistake.

What could it mean, then?

Again she struggled to release herself.

At the same time she spoke:

"Let me go!" she said. "Let me go! I have done you no harm—why should you interrupt me? Let me go!"

"Not if we know it—eh, Bob?" replied the man who held her, and addressing his companion.

"Certainly not! Just tell the young gal it's no good making a rumpus. If she will give in quietly, we won't hurt her!"

"In course not. What do we want to hurt the chicken for? But we must do our duty!"

"Come, young woman, it's no good for you to go for to resist.—not no good, at all! So come along with us!"

"Where—where?"

"Don't speak so loud, miss. Leastways, it don't much matter, for there's no one about to hear you, to my certain knowledge. As to where we are going to take you, that's our business!"

"Just so!" said the other. "Don't let's have any more palaverin! Call Jack, and we will be off!"

The man addressed, whistled sharply, and another man made his appearance.

"Game's up!" said one, as soon as he arrived. "We've got to go back, now!"

"And a good job, too, for I was getting infernally tired of this sort of work! I'm ready!"

Edgworth Bess listened to all this while in a state which is aptly described by the phrase mere dead than alive. She was stupefied at this sudden reverse.

She had only just before been congratulating herself upon her freedom, and now she found herself ten times more a prisoner than before, for now there was no hope of escape.

So overcome was she, that she had no power to resist.

Nor could she command her voice enough to shriek out for assistance, though in that lonely spot upon the river's bank, her cries would probably have been unheard, and certainly unheeded.

Resistlessly, then, the men led her forward in the direction which they had desired her to take.

Then one called out something, but what the poor girl did not know.

Her conductors paused, and the rumbling of wheels followed.

The men had hailed a hackney-coach, and it now drew up close to where they stood.

Still passive, Edgworth Bess was lifted into the vehicle.

Two of the men entered with her, the other one got on to the box along with the jarvey, and directed him where to drive.

Edgworth Bess was completely overcome by what had just taken place, and, as might naturally be expected, she felt the effects still more in consequence of the reaction which set in after her recent exertions.

She had very greatly overtaxed her strength, and now she was suffering for it.

Without, then, being precisely in an insensible state, she sat in the hackney-coach opposite to the two men.

She had a dim consciousness that they were before her, and that she was sitting in some vehicle which was in motion.

In this dreamy state she remained during the greater part of the journey.

The reader long ere this will have understood the meaning of her capture, and also by whom it was effected.

They cannot have forgotten the three janizaries who Jonathan had summoned to his side after he left the Prince of Wales Inn.

His instructions to them were simple enough.

They were to take their duty in turns.

Thus two men were always to be hovering about the exterior of the inn, and one always within it.

All were to look after Edgworth Bess, of whose personal appearance the bulldogs had already been furnished with a description.

She had been seen to emerge from the door in the wall by one of them, and his cries at once attracted the attention of the other on duty outside, who captured Edgworth Bess by throwing his arms around her, in the manner we have recorded.

The third, who was summoned by the whistle, came out of the house where he had been sitting, the whistle being an agreed upon signal for him to do so.

Jonathan had instructed them, in the event of their capturing Edgworth Bess in the act of making her escape, to take her direct to his house in Newgate Street with the least possible delay.

The men obeyed his orders implicitly, they had too much dread of the consequences of disobedience to attempt it.

Towards the thief-taker's residence the hackney-coach was rumbling at as swift a rate as the poor anatomies of horses that were harnessed to it could be induced to make.

Gradually, however, Edgworth Bess felt herself recovering, both bodily and mentally, from the shock which she had received.

She resolved to make at least an attempt to escape while there yet seemed a faint chance of success.

She surmised correctly enough that she was being taken to Wild's house in Newgate Street, and once within the walls of that gloomy habitation, she knew it would be impossible to escape unaided.

She must, then, make one more effort.

The interior of the coach was dark; but the men who were guarding her seemed to have eyes like cats, so closely did they watch her.

A quick movement alone could be successful.

The poor girl, rendered desperate by the nature of her situation, resolved upon a bold action.

It was, to open the door of the coach and spring out.

She might hurt herself severely; but, then, she might escape.

This was sufficient encouragement for her to make the requisite attempt.

With a sudden bound, which, as she had rightly anticipated, took the men completely by surprise, she reached the door of the coach.

She put her hand out in a moment and strove to turn the handle.

But it was stiff, and required the exercise of considerable strength to turn it.

That strength Edgworth Bess could not exercise, awkwardly situated as she was; and the men, who were now aware of what she was about, seized her by her arm and shoulder and drew her back on to the seat.

Foiled in this desperate attempt, the poor girl was no longer able to control her tears, and she sobbed violently.

She had now lost all hope.

She felt that now she could do nothing but passively submit to that malignant destiny which seemed ever to pursue her.

Her conductors now changed their position.

They sat on either side of her, instead of opposite, as they had done before.

She was thus completely in their power.

She might have screamed, but she really had not the heart to do so; and if she had, her cries would have been stopped in a moment, in a manner by far more effectual than pleasant.

At length, the coach came to a standstill.

The cessation of the movement caused Edgworth Bess to look up.

She found her forebodings fully realised.

The coach stopped opposite the thief-taker's house in Newgate Street.

As if by magic, the door of that doomed abode flew open before the revolution of the wheels had ceased.

The men opened the door of the coach and dragged their prisoner out with them.

Maddened with despair and desperation, the poor girl determined to make yet another effort for her freedom.

She set up a succession of the most piercing shrieks with so much suddenness, as to have almost a paralysing effect upon her guards.

So shrill were they, that they filled the whole street with their sound.

But they were abruptly put an end to.

One of the janizaries placed his hand rudely over her mouth, and then she was hurried into the house with breathless rapidity.

The door was closed the moment they entered, and the hackney-coach rolled away.

All this had taken place so quickly, that by the time people came running hastily to the spot to ascertain what had taken place, nothing was to be seen, and all was still.

One was bold enough to knock at the door of the thief-taker's house, and finding no notice was taken of his first summons, he repeated it.

Wild answered the door himself.

He took from his pocket the formidable bludgeon which he was scarcely ever without.

Then, holding it in readiness to strike, he opened the door quickly.

He just caught sight of someone.

Down came the bludgeon with the full force of his arm.

There was a disagreeable, sickening, crashing sound, and the man, with his hat knocked down over his eyes, rolled backwards down the steps into the street.

With a satisfied chuckle, Jonathan closed the door.

In the meantime, Edgworth Bess had been placed on the bench on which the man who was on the lock generally sat.

She no longer struggled, she no longer shrieked.

She was well aware of the futility of both.

The time had passed by when either would be of service to her.

In the thief-taker's house her struggles would be unheeded, and her shrieks would produce no more effect than if they had never been uttered.



SIR JAMES THORNHILL PAINTING JACK SHEPPARD'S PORTRAIT.

Jonathan Wild, having disposed of the inquisitive gentleman outside, came up to her.

With an affectation of excessive politeness, he took off his hat and made a very low bow.

Bess shuddered.

"I have to congratulate you!" he said, in a sneering, mocking voice—"I have to congratulate you upon your sudden, but nevertheless most welcome recovery from your illness! I was afraid I should be deprived of your society for some time longer yet; but fate, I see, has willed it otherwise! I am glad of it!"

The poor girl's heart sank within her at this address.

She would ten times rather have had Jonathan Wild ferocious and cruel, than thus pretending to be agreeable and kind.

She dreaded the worst from it.

But she did not speak.

She felt that she could not address herself to the villain who had been the bane of her young life.

"I regret," he continued, "that you are not pleased

No. 73.—BLUESKIN.

with the accommodation in my house, but I cannot remedy that just at present. You must wait a little while, and then you will have no cause to complain. Come, give me your hand, and I will lead you to your apartment."

Wild grinned facetiously as he uttered this last word with particular emphasis.

But Edgworth Bess did not move, or show the least symptom of obeying him.

Wild, however, came a step nearer, and took hold of her with one hand by the waist, and the other by the arm.

He was then easily able to raise her to a standing posture.

This done, he turned to Tonks, who had been a curious and amazed spectator of this singular scene.

"Quick, villain!" said Wild, "get a lantern and show me the way upstairs!"

Tonks flew to obey his commands.

A dark lantern was burning on a bracket near the door, and he took hold of it, saying:

"Here you are, if you please, Mr. Wild! This way! The lantern is alight!"

"Bah! Go on, will you!"

Tonks ascended the stairs backwards, in order that his imperious master should have the full benefit of the light he carried.

Up he went, until at length he was commanded by Wild to pause before a door.

It led into a chamber adjoining the one in which Blueskin had been confined.

The key was stuck in the lock, and Tonks opened the door.

Then he stood on one side.

Jonathan half-carried Edgworth Bess into the room.

"There!" he said, as he released her. "You can remain here until I have completed my arrangements."

CHAPTER CCCLVII.

Jonathan Wild writes a letter to the Secretary of State.

WITHOUT saying another word, Jonathan Wild retreated towards the door, and, crossing the threshold, closed it after him.

He took particular care to lock and bolt it; and then, with a sigh of satisfaction, he acknowledged that all was secure.

She could not escape.

That door would be proof against ten times the amount of strength which she could bring to bear upon it.

Then, the window was not only a giddy height from the ground, but was strongly protected with iron bars.

There was no fear, therefore, of her escaping that way.

Oh, how Jonathan Wild chuckled, and laughed, and rubbed his hands together as he descended the stairs, followed by the wondering Tonks.

His heart was elate at the fruition of his deep-laid scheme.

Upon reaching the landing on the first-floor he paused.

"Go down!" he said to Tonks; "if anything particular occurs I shall be here!"

The thief-taker entered the sitting-room as he spoke.

He was not a little surprised to find it completely filled with smoke, the odour of which proclaimed evidently enough that it was produced by the combustion of tobacco.

He entered, and was immediately greeted by a voice, the tones of which were familiar to him.

"Hullo, guv'nor, here you are at last! D—n me, if I thought you were ever coming into this room again, and I can't stir about!"

It was Wild, junior, who spoke.

"I did not know you were here, George," growled the thief-taker, as he strode across the room, and sank down in his accustomed seat near the fireplace.

"Well, guv'nor, I laid in bed till I could lay no longer, d—n me if I could! So, with a little assistance, I dressed myself and got down here, and here I have sat in this d—d hard chair ever since."

"I am glad to find you are well enough to get up, George," said Wild. "Events are approaching a climax."

"Are they? I thought so, d—d if I didn't!"

"What made you think that?"

"Why, this confounded wound of mine. Oh, d—n it! I can't help groaning now and then, it gives me such pinches."

"You have need to be thankful you are no worse."

"Well, I suppose so! But, come, guv'nor, tell us the news. How have things gone on—well or bad?"

"I should say well, but for one circumstance."

"What is that?"

"Oh, you know well enough!"

"I'm d—d if I do."

"I mean the loss of Lord Donnull's papers. If I had those, I should have the game entirely in my own hands."

"Then fortune has been favouring you of late, guv'nor?"

"Well, I have been a little luckier," said the thief-taker, with a complacent grin.

"What has happened? Tell me what good news you can, for I am so d—d melancholy, I don't know what to do with myself."

Jonathan paused a moment in reflection.

He hardly knew whether to tell his son or not.

Had he been less rejoiced or elated than he was just then, he would probably have held his peace.

As it was, he had not sufficient command of himself to do so.

"Jack Sheppard's in Newgate," he said.

"That's good news, at any rate," said Wild, junior. D—n his hide, I shall be glad to see him tucked up at Tyburn."

"No doubt you will; so shall I. Make haste and get well."

"That will recover me. When does the execution take place?"

"In a very few days."

"The devil!"

"I cannot fix the precise date."

"But the warrant for his execution is already signed, sealed, and delivered—is it not?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you act upon it?"

"The document requires to be re-endorse'd or something of that sort."

"Is it done?"

"Not yet. I went to see the Secretary of State this morning."

"Well?"

"He is somewhere in Scotland, but his arrival is expected every day."

"Oh, indeed!"

"I went because I thought I should have influence enough to induce him to let the execution take place without delay."

"But you could not see him?"

"No."

"How d—d unlucky, to be sure! What shall you do? Write?"

"I have already written."

"Oh, curse me, guv'nor, you are a real man of business, and no mistake!"

Wild grinned, and looked pleased at this compliment.

"What did you say in the letter?" continued his son.

"I have got a rough copy of it in my pocket-book."

"Read it, then—read it, guv'nor. It will do my heart good to hear it."

Jonathan Wild did not want much pressing.

Diving his hand into one of his capacious pockets, he drew forth a pocket-book, whose size corresponded well with the receptacle from which it had been taken.

It was crammed with papers of various descriptions, and, after some trouble, Jonathan produced one.

It was the rough draft of the letter he had written and forwarded to the Secretary of State.

His son George watched him eagerly while he unfolded it.

Then Jonathan, drawing the candle to the corner of the table, so as to have a full advantage of its light, began to read.

His son listened attentively.

The thief-taker read as follows:—

"My Lord,

"I write these few lines to you on a very important matter, which I hope will be my excuse for doing so. That infamous and notorious wretch, Jack Sheppard, the housebreaker and murderer, has at length, through the indefatigable exertions of your most humble servant to command, been recaptured and lodged in his most Gracious Majesty's prison of Newgate. This information will, I am sure, well afford you very great satisfaction. I have, your lordship, taken upon myself to look closely after his safe custody, and I am assured that the precautions which I have given Mr. Noakes, the Governor, to take, will effectually prevent this daring prison-breaker making a third escape. I much regret that your lordship should be absent at this juncture, as you are aware the warrant, which is already delivered for the execution of the prisoner, cannot be acted upon until endorsed by you, and through this the execution will be delayed, which I should like and advise should take place at the earliest possible moment, as any delay may only afford the prisoner opportunities for escape which he would not have if the execution took place at once.

"I therefore hope that your lordship will, with as little delay as possible, send authority for the wishes of your humble servant to be carried into effect, though you may depend no means will be left untried to keep him safe. His notorious companion, Joseph Blake—better known as Blueskin—I have also certain knowledge of, and in a few days I hope to be able to announce his capture and safe lodgment in gaol.

"This comes from your lordship's

"Most obedient and humble

"Servant to command,

"JONATHAN WILD."

The thief-taker read this letter with extraordinary unction, and when he had finished, folded it up carefully, and replaced it in his pocket-book with an air that said plainly enough that he was exceedingly well pleased with his performance.

"That's a d—d good letter, guv'nor!" was the comment made by his son as soon as he had done reading it—"a d—d good letter, and no mistake!"

In this the reader will probably agree, seeing that the thief-taker took to himself not only the capture of Jack Sheppard and safe lodgment in Newgate, but also the precaution which Mr. Noakes had devised and taken of visiting the prisoner frequently in his cell.

A politico man was Jonathan Wild, and it is beyond all doubt that by some such means as this, he contrived to get the credit he obtained.

"I hope it will achieve its object," he said, in reply to his son's commendatory remark; "I shall be more pleased and satisfied with it then."

"Don't trouble yourself about that, guv'nor. If the Secretary of State reads it, he will adopt your suggestions, never fear!"

"Do you really think so?" said Wild, whose weakest point was too great a susceptibility to be won over by a little flattery.

"I will wager my head against a brass farthing that he does!" replied his son, emphatically.

"Then all will be well. I shall sleep better when Jack Sheppard has taken his last look at this world at Tyburn."

"Ah, guv'nor, that reminds me! What other luck have you had lately—any?"

It was the flattery George had just administered that induced his father to reply:

"Yes, George," he said, "I have had a little more luck!"

"What? Let us hear it! You can't do a better thing than take me into your confidence!"

"I don't know that!" returned the thief-taker, sharply, whose suspicions had been aroused by this last remark, "I don't feel satisfied in my mind about the loss of those papers!"

"Oh!" exclaimed George, with an offended air, "If you are going to bring that subject up again, I am off to bed at once! I cannot stand it!"

"I can't help having my suspicions."

"I don't say anything about that, but I am d—d if anything will satisfy you or remove them! I have told you over and over again that I have not got them, and don't know where they are, but you won't believe me!"

"Well, well, I—"

"D—m me, if I won't have this affair settled one way or the other," interrupted George Wild, speaking in a tone of great resolution. "I say this affair shall be settled one way or another, and d—m me if it shan't this very night!"

"Listen to—"

"No, I'm d—d if I listen to you or anyone else! You listen and I'll speak, guv'nor, we can settle this here difference easy enough. It lies in a nutshell. You must either drop your suspicions, treat me with confidence, and be my friend and partner, or else I shall drop you and turn round against you! Do you understand that, guv'nor? You would not like to have me for an enemy—should you? There's no d—d weakness about me, and I should think no more about helping to scrag you than anyone else! I know one or two little things about you, guv'nor, that you would not care about having brought to light, but I would not mind doing it, not a bit; not if I knew you would be led off to Tyburn at once! So, guv'nor, I hope you understand me!"

George Wild spoke these words in a tone of great determination and menace, and he was encouraged to proceed by the visible effect which they had produced upon his parent.

He could see Jonathan wince and tremble as he spoke.

It was a bold and dangerous course to adopt, but George felt that his case was desperate, and that some desperate remedy would be required to effect a cure.

His bearing staggered the thief-taker in his suspicions.

"Now, guv'nor," continued George, "a word will settle this business. I am convinced that you suspect me. You have tried to take me by surprise—you have come upon me when I least expected a visit—you have searched my room in every nook and corner, and you have overhauled my clothes! What have you found? Nothing, because there was nothing hidden, and so, of course, you found nothing!"

"George!" replied Wild, "You have said quite enough! I can now see plain enough that my suspicions have been unjust. Think no more of it! We will be friends! We will place mutual confidence in each other! Are you willing?"

"Quite, guv'nor! I believe it will answer our purpose a great deal better to be friends than it would to be enemies."

"Shake hands, then!" said the thief-taker, "and we will consider the matter as settled!"

"With all my heart!" said George, as he took his father's hand within his own and pressed it.

It was a curious transaction, and it would indeed be a most difficult matter to say which of the parties was most sincere.

They were deceiving each other.

As he thought over the matter, Jonathan felt that his suspicions were by no means removed.

But under these circumstances he judged that his most prudent course would be to dissemble.

He felt how dangerous his son would be should he turn against him and become his enemy, and therefore he resolved to conciliate him by his real feelings.

Time, he thought, would unravel most things, and he had no doubt ere long something would turn up which would either confirm his suspicions or dissipate them.

CHAPTER CCLVIII.

JONATHAN WILD AND HIS SON BECOME BETTER FRIENDS WITH EACH OTHER.

AND so this precious pair shook hands with each other.

Wild, junior, was satisfied.

He believed that he had really succeeded in hoodwinking his very clever parent, and so he shook hands with the greatest cordiality.

The result of this hollow friendship will be exhibited in the sequel.

It will be shown that, by attempting to overreach each other, they materially helped to accelerate their own downfall and ruin.

The progress of events will, however, exhibit this.

We have now to deal with the transactions of the present time.

A pause followed the shaking hands, which was so disagreeable to George that he broke it.

"Well, guv'nor," he said, "now that we have made matters all right between us, let us have the piece of luck that you have met with! Have you captured Blueskin?"

"No, not yet."

"What then, guv'nor? Speak out, or I shall think you are playing fast and loose with me!"

"Don't be afraid of that, George! Something very important has taken place!"

"Then why don't you tell me what?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"Not, not without—"

"Without what?"

"Without you have captured the heiress!"

Jonathan nodded.

"Have you really done so?" said George, in a tone of voice which betokened how interested he was in the reply.

"I have!"

"When? How? Where is she?"

"How anxious you seem, George!"

"Of course I am anxious! Haven't you told me how important to *our* interests it was that the girl should be in *our* possession?"

George laid particular stress upon the two pronouns.

"But you seem so *very* anxious, George!"

"Do you think so, guv'nor?"

"I do!"

"Well, it's the truth. I am very anxious, for I think, guv'nor, if we can only bring that scheme to perfection, we shall be able to retire!"

"So we shall, George! But there is much to do between now and then!"

"I am aware of that, but it seems to me that no small portion is already accomplished."

"I have been lucky, George!"

"You have. First, there's that son of a devil, Jack Sheppard! You say he is in Newgate, and that the strictest care will be taken of him?"

"You are quite right."

"Then you say you have the heiress in your hands?"

"Yes, she's under my keeping!"

"Where? D—n it all, why don't you speak out?"

"You should not be so impatient, George. I will tell you all in good time. Edgworth Bess, for so I suppose I shall always call her, is safely locked up in one of the strong rooms at the top of the house."

George took careful note of this.

"Good!" he said. "Take care that she does not make her escape!"

"There's no fear of that."

"Well, then, take care that none of her friends rescue her!"

"Leave that to me! You need not trouble yourself about that! I have taken such measures as absolutely assure me of her safety!"

"Very well, guv'nor, you ought to know best, but I really must congratulate you upon the present aspect of affairs."

"It is promising to a degree, but not so promising as I could wish."

"What's the matter?"

"Jack Sheppard is not yet executed!"

"But he will be?"

"If I can bring that desirable event about; nevertheless, he is not executed!"

"Well, I grant that, guv'nor. What next?"

"Blueskin is not yet captured!"

"But he will be?"

"He must be!"

"Well, I don't see anything impossible, or even any difficulty about either of those?"

"Perhaps not. Still, before we can deal with Edgworth Bess, both these things must be accomplished."

"It will be best."

"Then, when those two meddling villains are out of the way, my course will be easier, but even then there will be difficulties."

"A mere trifle."

"No, no!"

"What is there, then?"

"The papers!"

"Oh, d—in those papers!"

"So say I, but for all that, they must be had, nothing can be done without them!"

"But supposing you had got the papers, guv'nor, what then?"

"Then our troubles would be over. We would obtain possession of all the money and estates, and divide the lot equally between us!"

"An excellent plan, guv'nor, and one that I shan't grumble at, you may depend!"

"You ought not!"

"Well, guv'nor, I will try to serve you all I can. You shan't have cause to repent of taking me into confidence and partnership. And now, guv'nor, about this young girl!"

"What about her?"

"Why, I must caution you not to make too sure of her safety! I have got a little scheme to propose for making her escape impossible!"

"What is it?"

"Why, guv'nor, I am far from well, and it will be some time yet before I am able to get about or go out of doors."

"Well, well?"

"I propose, then, that I should take up my quarters in the room which adjoins the one in which this girl is placed. I might as well be there as anywhere else, and I should be able to keep such a sharp look-out that I would stake my life she did not escape!"

Jonathan Wild glanced furtively into the face of his son as he made this proposition.

But George's countenance afforded no index to his mind, and Wild, astute as he was at reading other people's thoughts, was completely baffled by his son.

Whether he was anxious to undertake this duty from a proper motive, or whether he had some ulterior design of his own which such a proceeding would further, he could not tell.

At that moment Jonathan would have given anything to be assured of his son's good faith.

If he was sincere and acting straightforwardly towards him, nothing would have pleased Jonathan better than for George to have took up his guard in the way he had mentioned.

But he could not drive the papers out of his mind.

He could not help thinking that George had abstracted them, and concealed them somewhere.

If so, it would answer his purpose best to get on good terms with the heiress, and this proximity would afford him every opportunity of achieving his purpose.

A cold shiver crept over the thief-taker as an unpleasant conviction suggested itself to his mind.

Could it be that his son was merely making use of him as a tool?

Could it be that he (Jonathan) was taking all this trouble for the aggrandisement of another?

He sickened at the thought.

George had once before served him a rascally trick, and why should he not do so a second time?

What if George only made use of him for his own ends.

Suppose, when all was achieved, instead of receiving his share, his son was to turn round upon him and hand him over to the executioner!

He knew that his son was in possession of certain occurrences which, if disclosed in proper quarters, would have the effect of consigning him to the scaffold.

He was also too well acquainted with his son's disposition to think that he would for a moment scruple to do so.

He was certain he would not hesitate.

Even in this world, then, Jonathan began to be aware that there was such a thing as retribution.

It came upon him in the form of his son.

Indeed, what he then suffered was an instalment of the punishment which he deserved, and which he was destined to receive on earth.

Had Jack Sheppard been able to comprehend his feelings, he would have felt a certain amount of sorrow for him.

He could not have helped pitying him.

So acute were his feelings that the thief-taker could not repress a groan.

His son started as the unexpected sound came upon his ears.

He wondered what could have produced it.

"Hullo, guv'nor!" he said, roughly; "what is the matter?"

Jonathan recovered himself, and looked up.

"I have been hurt," he said, "and I felt a sudden pain."

"Ah! I know what that is; I don't wonder at your groaning!"

"It was sharp and sudden!" said the thief-taker, who, by a second effort, succeeded in thoroughly obtaining the mastery over his emotions.

"Well, but you haven't told me what you think of my proposition!" said Wild, junior, after a short pause.

"I think it a very good one!" replied the thief-taker, with another groan, but this time it was an inward one, and inaudible to his son.

"Well, that's just what I think, guv'nor! You leave her to me, and I will be answerable for her safe keeping. You ought to be glad to have that trouble taken off your hands, because it will allow you to devote more of your thoughts, time, and attention to Jack Sheppard."

"It will!"

"And I am sure he requires it! You must not leave Noakes to keep him secure. If you do, you will find your-

self in the wrong box, for Noakes is nothing better than a d—d fool!"

"I believe that," said Jonathan. "Do not fear! I shall look closely after Mr. Jack myself. I have already paid him two visits since his imprisonment—one not long ago. I examined all his fetters, and looked all about the cell; but all was quite safe, and just as it had been left!"

"I should advise you to go again early in the morning, guv'nor. You can't tell what he might be at to-night!"

"Very true; and I would not have him get loose again upon any consideration!"

"Nor I, or else you would have all your trouble over again."

"It is an unfortunate thing that the Secretary of State is not in London. If he was, we would get Jack executed on Monday. As it is, there is sure to be a delay, because the sessions begin on the Monday following."

"That's d—d awkward, guv'nor!"

"It is, because I don't suppose I could get a special hanging-day appointed for him, and so he would have to wait until the Monday after that."

"Oh, the devil! That will never do!"

"I am afraid we shall have to put up with it, George. To-night is Friday—or, as I suppose, is fast getting towards Saturday morning. If the Secretary of State is in Scotland, it is impossible for me to have an answer back in time."

"But you said he was expected to return every day!"

"So he is!"

"He might come back to-morrow?"

"He might, and that is our only chance; I must say, it is a very slight one."

"Very indeed!"

"You will now comprehend my anxiety to have this business over quickly. There are eight men in Newgate under sentence of death, and in all probability they will everyone be executed next Monday morning. Now, I wanted to get Jack Sheppard in among that batch!"

"It would be a d—d good thing if you could, guv'nor—it would indeed! Don't you think you could get him in somehow, and have the warrant signed afterwards?"

"I daresay I could, but that pig-headed Sheriff Mooney has a spite against me, and opposes me all he can, so I should not be able to get his consent."

"Then it appears, guv'nor, that Jack Sheppard will have to be in Newgate for rather more than a fortnight?"

"It will be a fortnight next Monday to the next hanging-day!"

"Then it's a shame, that's all I can say! We are to miss all this week through a pig-headed sheriff and a d—d Secretary's signature!"

"Just so. I am afraid there is no hope of getting him to appoint a special hanging-day for Jack. The sheriffs would oppose that again."

"Oh, d—n the sheriffs!"

"Amen! with all my heart!"

"I'll tell you what it is, guv'nor!—you must leave that girl, Edgworth Bess as you call her, entirely to me, as I said before, I will be answerable for her safety! You must forget all about her, and direct the whole of your energies to keeping Jack Sheppard safe in gaol for such a long time. It strikes me you will find it no easy matter."

"I am afraid so, too!"

"Well, then, that ought to show you the necessity of never quitting him. Why, d—n it, if I was well enough I would sit outside his cell door, and never move till he was led out to be pinioned!"

"I will look after him, never fear!" said Jonathan, in a revengeful tone of voice. "I have a grudge against him, and rest assured that I will see it paid. As you say, George, you shall look well after Edgworth Bess, and I will do nothing else but see that Jack Sheppard does not make a third escape from Newgate."

CHAPTER CCCLIX.

JACK SHEPPARD SUCCEEDS IN UNDOING HIS FETTERS WITHOUT THE AID OF A KEY.

WE confess we fairly tremble for the safety of Jack Sheppard.

This time we fear he stands a very poor chance of escaping an ignominious ride to Tyburn indeed.

The many events we have described in the course of this

narrative will prove that Jonathan Wild was a man of no common order.

The main cause of his want of success in his great designs was that he undertook too much, so that, of consequence, his attention was divided.

Now, however, he was no longer to be perplexed like the sportsman in the fable.

His son George had taken the care of Edgworth Bess off his hands,—the police officers were directing all their attention to capturing Blueskin.

He was, then, in a position to devote himself entirely to Jack Sheppard, and make it his special business to see that he did not escape.

The Governor of Newgate had resolved to neglect everything else to achieve the same object, and with these two implacable and personal enemies, what chance would Jack have for the exercise of his extraordinary ingenuity and industry?

He was doomed.

Then there was the application which had been made to the Secretary of State.

The issue of that application was very doubtful, for none could tell how soon that official personage would be in London.

He was hourly expected, and, of course, the very moment he arrived, Jonathan Wild would instantly be communicated with.

Even if he came so late as Sunday night, it would be in time.

The reader must not forget that at the time of which we write, no rapid means of communication existed.

The electric telegraph and the locomotive engine were both undreamt of.

Truly did Jack's fate hang upon the merest thread.

Let us return to him.

We left him vexed and angry.

He had been tugging vainly at his chain in the endeavour to reach the nail in the wall.

While so engaged, he heard footsteps, and undesirous of discovery, he had relinquished his efforts, and resumed his old attitude upon the stone bench.

He was only just in time.

The door opened, and the Governor and Jonathan Wild appeared.

While speaking to his son, the thief-taker stated he had had two interviews with Jack Sheppard since his capture.

The first has been described; the second was now about to take place.

There was nothing important in the details.

As night was coming on, the thief-taker had judged it advisable to have one more look at his prisoner.

The two hours having again elapsed, the Governor willingly accompanied him; but, instead of just putting his head inside the door, and giving a hasty glance around, as he had done on the previous occasion when alone, he followed Jonathan into the cell.

Wild glanced keenly at the prisoner, who, however, relapsed into his former sullen mood, refusing to speak or to take notice of anything that was going on around him.

Mr. Noakes carried a lantern in his hand, for the passages through which they had to pass to reach the strong room were dark ones, and Wild requested him to bring it in order to ascertain whether the fetters had been tampered with.

The thief-taker was surprised to see Jack sitting there so quietly.

He could not make it out, and he was suspicious accordingly.

So far as he could see, however, all was well, and the prisoner did not seem to have stirred hand or foot since he left him.

Of his failure in obtaining an interview with the Secretary of State, Wild said not a word, and Jack Sheppard never addressed a single question to him.

The thief-taker was not satisfied, though, with the cursory examination he had made.

He would not feel satisfied until he had looked at the fetters, link by link; and he now took the lantern from the Governor for that purpose.

Jack Sheppard scowled when his old enemy approached him, but that was all the notice he thought fit to take.

Jonathan observed it, and said, mockingly:

"Don't be angry, Jack, lad—don't be angry! I won't

hurt you, but I cannot rest until I have seen that your pretty jewellery is not out of repair anywhere!"

Jack calmed himself.

He wished to mislead and deceive his foes as much as possible, and knowing that the fetters were in just the same condition as they were when put on, he had nothing to fear from Wild's examination, so he permitted him to make it unresistingly.

Jonathan was forced to confess himself satisfied.

The fetters were all right.

He was convinced that not even an attempt had been made to tamper with them.

He could scarcely believe this, and was forced to come to the conclusion that either Jack was convinced of the hopelessness of making an escape, or else he had some deep-laid scheme maturing in his brain.

The latter seemed most likely.

But Jack persisted in maintaining his obstinate silence, and eventually the Governor and Jonathan withdrew.

Jack listened until he heard their footsteps become inaudible in the distance, and then he said:

"I see it all now! Their plan is clear enough. There is no longer room for me to doubt it. They made up their minds to visit me at these frequent intervals, being under the impression that by so doing they will most effectually prevent my escape. Such a course, if they continue it, cannot fail to answer their purpose and consign me to despair. Before I made any progress I should be discovered. I have no chance without I can succeed in tiring them out. This is a faint chance indeed, when the dispositions of these two men are taken into account. Still, they may grow weary after a time, when they find that they have no recompense for their trouble. After a time, do I say? How do I know how soon they may drag me forth to execution? Perhaps the day after tomorrow! If so, farewell hope!"

Jack Sheppard let his head fall between his hands, and for a few moments gave way to despondency.

Rousing himself, he bethought himself of the manner in which he was engaged when he was interrupted by his late visit.

The prospect of having to remain all night in his fetters was so distasteful a one that he resolved to prevent it if he could.

Jack had a peculiar faculty of picking locks.

The rudest tool sufficed for his purpose, so very dexterous was he, but then the locks with which he had to deal were not by any means complex pieces of mechanism.

A crooked nail he felt sure would be the very thing to answer his purpose, and there was a nail sticking in the wall only an inch or two out of the reach of his fingers.

Despite his former failure, he resolved to try once more whether he could not succeed.

He rose painfully and slowly, for his limbs were cramped terribly.

His first care was to see that the chain by which he was secured to the wall was not twisted in any part, so that he might have the full advantage of its length.

Having done this, he proceeded to creep along the face of the wall towards the nail.

A cry of joy—of overpowering joy—came from his lips.

He could reach it.

When he had overcome the sensations of delight which this discovery afforded him, he began to tax his brain to account for being able to reach it on this second occasion, when he had failed to do so on the first.

This for a long time baffled him.

There was but one solution of the difficulty that he could think of, and that happened to be the correct one.

On the previous occasion he had forgotten to straighten his chain.

Consequently it was twisted and shortened two or three inches.

He was unable then to reach the wished-for object.

Now, however, that he had taken the precaution to see that the chain was not kinked up anywhere, he was enabled to touch the nail with the tips of his fingers.

Having accounted for the circumstance in this manner, he proceeded to loosen the nail in its setting.

But this he found was a far more difficult task than he had expected.

The mortar with which the stones were cemented together was almost as hard as the stones themselves.

Patiently, however, Jack tugged at the nail, pulling it backwards and forwards, and loosening it by slow degrees.

This encouraged him to persevere with his efforts.

He knew that in the end he must succeed.

But it was a tiresome, tedious operation, and his fingers ached terribly.

Indeed, the pain became so great that he had to pause and rest.

But he went to work again with renewed vigour and determination.

It was quite dark, though, before he succeeded in drawing out the nail, but he did it.

He had won.

The victory was his.

Never did a miser feel so delighted at the acquisition of some priceless treasure which had cost him much toil, than did Jack Sheppard when he at length held this nail in his hand.

But his blissful anticipations were quickly put to flight. He was startled by footsteps in the corridor.

This told him that another two hours had elapsed.

What to do with the nail was a puzzling question.

Where could he conceal it?

If he put it in any of his pockets, there was every risk of its being found.

If he hid it under the bench, it would very likely be seen by some one.

Where, then, was he to put it?

He had little time to decide.

He felt inclined more than once to stick it in the wall again as though it had not been disturbed.

But he naturally shrank from this exposure of his treasure to anyone who might enter the dungeon.

And yet Neakes and the thief-taker had visited him several times without appearing to perceive it.

If he removed it and left the hole in the mortar visible, it might immediately attract his foes' attention.

All these thoughts swept through his brain simultaneously.

He had no time to deliberate.

He could not think of a better plan than restoring the nail to the place from whence he had taken it, and with many misgivings he did so.

Then he had barely time to seat himself before the door opened.

A bright flash of light streamed in, and he perceived the countenance of the Governor.

Mr. Neakes was getting sick of this continual visiting to the cells, and had it not been for the fear he had of Jonathan Wild he would have given the job to some one else.

But he dared not.

But he performed his duty in a very careless manner.

He cast one glance around the cell, and then withdrew.

Jack breathed more freely.

His nail was safe.

Afraid, however, lest the Governor should make a sudden and unexpected return, he waited for some moments in a state of great impatience before he stirred.

But all having become quiet, he rose to his feet and crept towards the nail for the third time.

He seized it, and drew it out with the utmost ease.

Then, sitting down, he went to work with it.

He made his first trial upon the padlock which secured him to the chain that was fastened in the wall.

This was the largest.

With almost as little trouble as he would have had if he held the proper key in his hand he undid it.

He placed the chain down quietly, so that a sudden clank upon the stones should not be the means of spreading an alarm.

So far he was free.

He was free to walk to any part of the dungeon that he thought proper; and even this seemed liberty after his late severe confinement.

But he did not pause.

Stimulated by his success, he set to work upon the other locks, and in a few moments undid them all.

He was now hampered only by the handcuffs round his wrists and the fetters which were riveted to his ankles.

Neither of these he was able to remove; nor did he, indeed, attempt it.

The reason will be seen presently.

Having disencumbered himself of the heavy irons, Jack made no further attempt to escape, but lay down on the stone bench, in order to obtain, if he possibly could, a few hours' repose and rest.

He was much fatigued; and though his bed was so hard, yet in a few moments he was fast asleep, and continued so until just before daybreak.

Mr. Noakes paid one more visit to the cell during the night.

He gave one sleepy glance around, and perceiving his prisoner was on the bench, concluded all was right, and retired without discovering that he was unfettered.

CHAPTER CCCLX.

JACK SHEPPARD FINDS A GOOD HIDING-PLACE FOR THE NAIL WHICH DID HIM SUCH GOOD SERVICE, AND GIVES AN AUDIENCE TO SOME VISITORS.

Of this nocturnal visitation Jack Sheppard remained oblivious.

It was very incautious of him to sleep so soundly, but he was not master of his own actions.

Had the Governor performed his duty in a proper manner and as carefully as Jonathan Wild thought he would perform it, he would have discovered that Jack was sleeping more comfortably than he should have been.

But, as we have seen, through the carelessness of the Governor this discovery was not made.

It was about aa hour before daybreak when Jack Sheppard awoke.

His limbs were somewhat cramped, and he felt chilled through to the bone.

Nevertheless, the deep, uninterrupted sleep he had taken had refreshed him in no ordinary degree.

He felt light-hearted and blithe.

His first care was to run hastily about the cell, in order to circulate the blood and remove the stiffness of his joints.

He found this did him a world of good, and he continued the exercise for a long time, running round and round the cell, and sometimes pacing up and down it with rapid strides.

At length he was warned by the increased light that found its way through the grated window, that it was high time to desist.

He could not tell how soon after daybreak he might be troubled with another visit, and he had the fetters to put on again.

This would probably be a long and difficult operation, for he would have to perform it in such a manner as to prevent his foes seeing that the fetters had been tampered with.

He sat down, then, on the stone bench, and patiently set to work to secure himself again.

With much more ease than he had dared to anticipate, he locked the padlocks again by means of the nail he had so fortunately acquired.

In less than a quarter of an hour all was done, and not even the most experienced person could have told that they had been removed.

He was highly satisfied with his achievements, but soon found himself in a great dilemma as to what he should do with the nail.

If by any unlucky accident he should be deprived of it, he would no longer be able to enjoy even the semblance of a comfortable night's repose.

He did not altogether like the idea of restoring the nail to the place from whence he had taken it.

If he did so, there would be great danger that some time or other Jonathan Wild or the Governor would catch a glimpse of it, and, conceiving it to be dangerous, would remove it.

But then, on the other hand, both might know, from previous observation, that a nail was there, and its disappearance would not fail to excite their suspicions, even if the hole in the wall from where he had taken it did not attract their observation.

Jack was in a dilemma.

Could he but have hit upon some really capital hiding-place, where he could feel sure there was little or no fear of its being found, he would not have troubled himself in the least about the discovery of the hole in the wall.

But where within the limited dimensions of his cell was he to find such a place?

His cell, did we say?

For it to be of any service to him, he would have to conceal it somewhere within his reach while he was chained.

He puzzled his brains in vain to think of a hiding-place.

There was not one that occurred to his mind which offered sufficient prospect of safety.

He thought once of keeping it in his pocket until he heard some one come to the door, and then have slipped it into his mouth; but he rejected this, as the first time he spoke he must have inevitably betrayed himself.

What was to be done?

At length he hit upon a happy expedient, and yet so simple a one that he was completely at a loss to think how it was the idea had never occurred to him before.

The floor of his cell was paved with large flag-stones, several of which were broken, while others were very uneven.

Between all, however, was a wide space where they were joined together by mortar.

The floor of the cell was damp—the mortar would consequently be soft.

What, then, would be more easy than for Jack to press the nail down into the mortar with his foot?

To withdraw it, when necessary, from so soft a bed would be an easy enough matter.

It would thus be completely buried, with the exception of the head, and this being of the same colour as the mortar itself, there did not seem to be the least possibility of its discovery, even if the closest search should be made after it.

Jack was so pleased with this expedient, that he lost no time in adopting it.

He selected one of the joints in the stones just where he could put his foot, so that there would be this additional means of concealment.

As he fully expected, the mortar was so soft and moist with the damp, that he pressed the nail in with the utmost ease.

He placed his heel upon it and stood up, thus making sure that the head of the nail was on a level with the adjoining stenes.

Jack was well pleased with what he had done, and he seated himself with a contented air.

He felt now that no inconsiderable step towards accomplishing his freedom had been taken; and he could now, he thought, afford to wait with patience.

While the Governor and the thief-taker continued to pay such frequent visits, he felt that it would be neither more nor less than ridiculous to attempt anything, since discovery would be the only result.

He had but one chance, and that was to tire them out.

He judged, and not without some reason, that they would grow weary of such frequent and resultless visits after a time, and so it behoved him not to do anything that would at all arouse their suspicions.

If he could only lull them into a sense of false security—if he could only succeed in making them believe that the prospect of making his escape was so hopeless that he did not intend to attempt it—all would be well.

But there was one point upon which he could not help feeling a terrible amount of uneasiness.

That was as to the day which was fixed for his execution.

He knew Jonathan Wild would use every effort to get it to take place as soon as possible; but then the affair did not rest in his hands, powerful as he was.

Indeed, Jack was by no means clear whether he would not have to take another trial, or be examined before a magistrate, or something of that sort.

At any rate, he felt certain that he would have a day or two's notice.

Had he been aware that the Secretary of State was not in London, and that if he did not return before Sunday night, his execution could not take place until a fortnight afterwards, he would not have cared a jot.

In that time he felt certain that he should be able to tire his foes completely.

He was the more inclined to think this, because he perceived that Mr. Noakes was fast growing tired of his extra and self-imposed duty.

Jonathan Wild was the man he had most to fear. Nevertheless, Jack did not think the prospect before him was altogether a hopeless one.

He resolved to wait with patience, and not destroy the faint chance he had by undue precipitation.

He was hungry, and day fast advancing, so that he expected a fresh visit almost every moment.

He was not deceived in his expectation.

A short time afterwards he heard the well-known scound which heralded the approach of persons to his dungeon.

Jack's ears were quick, and he could tell long before they paused before the door, that on this occasion three persons were approaching.

He looked curiously towards the door to ascertain who they could be.

He was not long kept in suspense.

The door opened, and the forms of Jonathan Wild, Mr. Noakes, and a keeper were revealed.

The latter carried in his hands a small quantity of rough food and a pitcher of water.

Jonathan Wild strode into the cell with a triumphant smile upon his face.

He was followed closely by the Governor.

The former having glanced at Jack, looked carefully around the cell.

But the hole in the wall from whence the nail had been taken being small, escaped his observation.

Nor did Mr. Noakes appear to notice it.

Satisfied with this general survey, the thief-taker now approached the prisoner in order to examine his fetters.

Jack resolved to allow him to do so unresistingly.

He kept his foot over the place in the floor where the nail was hidden.

If he resisted Wild, or in any way hindered him from making the examination, he rightly thought that it would merely serve to make him suspicious.

He knew very well that he had nothing to fear in the shape of discovery, if the closest search was made.

He certainly had, on this occasion, adopted the wisest and most prudent course he possibly could.

Jonathan looked at the fetters closely, but could detect nothing wrong, and when he had finished, it was with the conviction in his mind that the irons had not been touched.

In order to appear more at his ease, Jack took up the bread which the turnkey had brought and began to eat it, though, had he been less hungry than he was, his stomach would have rebelled against it.

Forced to be content, Jonathan turned aside.

He said nothing about the Secretary of State, of course, for he wished most particularly to keep from Jack's knowledge all that had occurred.

He attempted to draw Jack into a conversation, but failed to do so; and having made a few remarks of too trivial and unimportant a character to be set before the reader, he and his precious friend the Governor withdrew.

Jack was heartily glad when they had taken their departure, and went on with his meal in silence.

The food was bad, but it was better than none, and he was under the necessity of eating something in order to support nature.

The pitcher contained a small quantity of tolerably clean water.

Jack, in a general way, preferred a stronger and more palatable beverage, but now he had no choice, and he drank out of the pitcher with avidity.

When this was done, he leaned back on the bench in as comfortable a position as he could.

All he had to do was to wait for the time to pass away.

That day he knew was doomed to be one of inaction to him.

Little, though, did he dream of the important events which were destined to take place.

The day was a busy one.

As may be readily believed, the news of Jack Sheppard's capture and incarceration, had spread with great rapidity throughout the metropolis, and for some time the keenest interest was felt in all his actions.

This is not to be wondered at, when we think that he had twice done that which had hitherto been deemed an impossibility—that was, escaped from Newgate.

The greatest curiosity was felt by almost everybody to have a glance at this lad, who had done so much, and who had made himself so famous.

Those who had the power to grant orders of admission to see the prisoner were literally overwhelmed with applications.

As a matter of course, the titled and the rich were favoured, and to these orders in great numbers had been given.

Poor Jack knew nothing about this, and little dreamed that he would be kept in Newgate on purpose to be looked at and talked about, as people would about some wild and curious animal.

That day, however, was destined to witness the arrival of a great many of these visitors.

Jack had scarcely despatched his miserable breakfast and comfortably seated himself before he was disturbed by footsteps and voices.

He started up in surprise.

The tones were different to any he had heard during his sojourn in the prison, and he wondered what could be the cause of it.

His surprise and astonishment increased when several persons entered the cell.

They had manifestly come to see him, and by the rich dresses worn by several he could tell they belonged to what is called the upper class of society.

The following extract from the "Newgate Calendar" proves this to be truth, not fiction:—

"The curiosity of the public being greatly excited by his former escapes, he was visited by great numbers of people of all ranks, and scarce any one left him without making him a present in money; he would have more gladly received a file, a hammer, or a chisel—but the utmost care was taken that none of his visitors should furnish him with such implements."

That this was excessively distasteful to Jack Sheppard the reader will easily believe.

He did not like the idea of being made a gaping stock of, but he had no choice in the matter.

The money which was offered him he took readily enough, because it would enable him to have better food than the prison regulations allowed.

Nor did Jack feel that there was any need for him to make enemies of these people, so he received them all civilly enough, and answered their questions quickly and pleasantly, being not without the hope that by so doing he should be able to excite a popular feeling in his favour.

It served, too, to pass away the time.

The day would otherwise have hung very heavily upon his hands.

These visits continued up to a late hour in the evening.

No one stayed very long, but as fast as one departed another took his place.

At length, the last one departed, and then Jack found himself in possession of a tolerable sum.

With reckless prodigality, he gave the turnkey a couple of guineas to get him a nice supper, and told him he might keep the change himself.

This made Jack a friend in a moment, and on that night at least Jack fared better, so far as eating and drinking were concerned, than he had done for a long time past.

CHAPTER CCCLXI.

DESCRIBES THE UNCOMFORTABLE MANNER IN WHICH JACK SHEPPARD SPENT SUNDAY IN NEWGATE.

JACK was glad when night came.

The fetters had galled him terribly during the day, and he longed for the time to come when he should be free from them.

He did not dare, however, attempt to unlock his chains until the Governor and his coadjutor, Jonathan Wild, had paid him his last visit.

But to his surprise they came not, though he was sure it was long past the hour at which they visited him on the preceding evening.

What could be the meaning of it?

Surely they had not given over and got tired already?

No, Jack could not think that.

Something of an unusual nature had taken place.

That portion of Newgate in which Jack was situated was far removed from any of the habitable parts of the building.



BLUESKIN IS CAPTURED BY JONATHAN WILD.

He was, therefore, unable to estimate with any exactness how late it was, but he judged from the time that had elapsed since he had taken his supper that it was close upon midnight.

Surely it was too late for his foes to come and visit him.

He almost felt inclined to unlock his fetters, so assured did he feel that they would not come.

It is easy to understand his impatience.

Presently, however, as he stooped to pick up the nail with the full intention of unfastening the irons, a thought occurred to him which made him pause suddenly and change his mind.

He put his fingers at the side of his nose, and shook his head in a sagacious manner.

"I have it!" he muttered. "They have not paid me a visit because they thought I should be thrown off my guard if they did not. That is it—I feel sure that is it! Ha, ha! How lucky I thought of it! Jonathan, with all your monstrous cleverness, you will be foiled again."

No. 74.—BLUESKIN.

Jack sat down with a contented air, resolved to wait with patience until his persecutors appeared.

He no longer cared about the weight of his fetters now that he believed he was about to discomfit Jonathan Wild.

But plausible as the hypothesis which he had started seemed, yet it was not the real solution of the mystery of the non-appearance of Jonathan Wild and Mr. Noakes.

The cause which produced it was far different, and the reader will find shortly, when we describe the events which took place on the outside of Newgate on that eventful Saturday, that the circumstances which produced it were more intimately connected with Jack Sheppard than he thought they were.

It was, however, quite natural for Jack to think that the reason why his old enemies had not made their accustomed appearance was because they hoped to throw him off his guard.

He leaned back, but as time passed by without their coming, he felt inclined to run the risk of taking off his irons.

Luckily, he did not.

Shortly afterwards he heard the sounds in the passage which indicated their approach.

Directly afterwards, Wild and the Governor appeared.

The latter carried a torch in his hand, and, by the aid of its lurid light, Jack was able to observe the expression of their countenances with great exactness.

He was surprised to see upon both such an expression of triumph as he had never witnessed before.

They seemed to be boiling over with it.

Jonathan Wild advanced with a mincing step.

He made that curious chuckling sound in his throat which he always did when something had occurred to greatly delight him.

He paused before Jack, and placed his hands behind him.

"Ha, ha!" he said.

He ceased as abruptly as he had begun.

Jack Sheppard looked at him with wonder, in which uneasiness was mingled.

He was utterly at a loss to think what their strange behaviour meant.

The Governor, too, who had according to custom closed and locked the door, now came forward, and stood by the side of Wild.

"Ha, ha!" he said, very much in the same manner as the thief-taker.

What could they mean?

Was their object to mystify Jack Sheppard?

If so, they succeeded most completely.

He gazed at them in absolute wonderment.

"Are you all right, Jack?" said Wild. "I must have a look. Ha, ha! I'm very sorry I kept you so late. But no matter! Better late than never! I have been detained by some business of importance. Oh, Jack, I have news—rare news—but I would not let you know what has taken place for all the world!"

"Take that, then!" said Jack, and, as he spoke, he hit the thief-taker rather a sharp blow on the head with a fetter. "Take that, and don't aggravate me!"

Jonathan looked up from his task of examining Jack's fetters.

"Ha, ha!" he said. "Very funny, isn't it? Why, you seem quite playful, Jack. But, never mind! Ha, ha!"

It was strange, but Wild did not resent the blow which Jack had given him.

Was his exultation so great that it blinded him to everything else?

It would seem so, for he still chuckled in his throat as he turned round to follow Mr. Noakes from the dungeon.

"Good night, my lad!" he cried. "It's rather late, and I am going home to bed. I hope you will sleep comfortably with all your jewellery upon you. Ha, ha! Jack, you little dream of what has taken place, and what has caused me to be so late in visiting you to-night."

The door closed, and the bolts were shot into their staples, and the key turned.

Jack Sheppard was alone, and in darkness.

He passed his hands in a confused manner over his head as he murmured:

"What can it all mean? What has happened?"

But though he taxed his brain to the utmost, he was unable to find any solution to that difficulty.

There was nothing that he could think of that would account for Wild's extraordinary exultation.

At length he gave up the attempt in despair, and set to work to unlock his fetters.

This did not take him many minutes, and he passed the night in the same manner as the preceding one, though his sleep was not so sound, for his brain was perplexed by what had just taken place.

Before daybreak he ran up and down his cell to circulate his blood, and then put on his fetters.

It was Sunday morning, and the turnkey generally made his rounds a little later on that day, so that Jack had to sit a long while before any of them made their appearance.

At length, the same man who had brought him his supper entered, and asked him what he would like for breakfast.

There was now no longer a necessity to eat dry bread and water.

Thanks to the munificence of his visitors on the preced-

ing day, he was in a position to have what he liked to eat and drink, for such a proceeding was not at that time at variance with prison regulations.

On this morning, then, Jack Sheppard fared sumptuously.

Scarcely, however, had he despatched the meal than the Governor, the chaplain—or ordinary, as he was called—accompanied by several turnkeys, entered the cell.

Jack gazed at them in astonishment.

But he was quickly made to understand what was meant.

On Sunday morning all the prisoners in the gaol were compelled to attend service in the chapel.

The hour had not arrived for the prisoners to be marshalled to their pews, but it was judged expedient, as Jack Sheppard was such a desperate character, to take him there, strongly guarded, before the rest.

This was done.

He was unchained from the wall, and some of the heavier portion of his fetters taken off, and then, hemmed in by about half a dozen turnkeys, he was led towards the chapel.

The Governor and the ordinary, between whom, as they were kindred spirits, a very good understanding existed, brought up the rear.

Jack Sheppard did not attempt the least resistance.

He was well aware that it could not avail him in the slightest.

He contented himself with observing as closely as he could everything that he saw.

The knowledge of the precise position of his cell would one day be useful to him.

Accordingly he paid the most particular attention to the route by which he was taken to the chapel.

He noted every passage, and counted every step in the staircase which he ascended.

At length the door of the chapel was reached.

It was a small stone chamber, and a chill air hung about it.

Jack shivered when he entered.

The silence of the grave prevailed in the place, for it was quite empty.

It was dark and gloomy-looking.

Jack was led to one particular pew which had been prepared expressly for him.

It was surrounded by boards, so that none could see him, and he could see no one.

Into this box-like place he suffered his janitors to lead him unresistingly.

Two preceded him, and two followed.

Then the door of the pew was securely locked.

Jack was now tolerably safe.

He was well secured by his fetters.

He was locked up in a place which looked more like a huge box without a lid than aught else, and he was seated with two strong turnkeys on each side of him.

There was no fear of his doing any mischief under these circumstances.

Such a thought never entered his head.

He looked up and saw the ceiling overhead, but that was the only thing that met his view.

Suddenly the tomb-like silence which prevailed was broken by a low, muffled, shuffling sound.

It was the prisoners being led into the chapel.

Then another pause took place, and then service commenced.

Jack was heartily glad when it was over.

But all the other prisoners were led back to their cells before he was released.

At length they came to him, and he was taken back to his old quarters, and chained securely to the wall.

It was now dinner-time, and the turnkey who had taken upon himself the office of purveyor brought in a capital meal, to which Jack did ample justice.

He was hardly allowed to finish it, however, for the same procession entered, and conducted him to the chapel.

This was repeated in the evening, and then he was brought back to have his supper in comfort.

Jack had only one consolation, and that was, that he had thoroughly imprinted on his mind the route to the chapel, and he was convinced that if he was once outside his cell he could find his way there blindfold.

Jonathan Wild had not made his appearance during the day.

Doubtless he thought it would be unnecessary, as he would be so closely watched.

But there was, in addition to this, another reason, with which the reader will presently be made acquainted.

At night, however—the last thing—he came, and so did the Governor.

They satisfied themselves that the fetters were all right, and then left the cell.

Jack noticed that they did not stop near so long on this occasion, and he was pleased, for it looked as though they were beginning to grow tired.

As soon as they had got out of hearing, he stooped down, and with very little trouble drew the nail out of the mortar.

He was now quite practised in the use of it, and had the locks unfastened in a trice.

No one could possibly believe the relief it was to him to be freed from his fetters even for so short a time.

Having warmed himself by moving about rapidly, he laid himself down upon the hard stone bench and composed himself to sleep.

But it was long ere he could close his eyes.

His brain was too busily speculating upon the events which had taken place, and those which were in futurity.

The sessions would commence on the morrow.

For this he felt thankful.

He was aware that during this time the attention of all the officials would be directed to the court where the trials were taking place.

The Governor would have to attend there, and so, too, would Jonathan Wild, for scarcely an assize passed without his appearing before the judge in some capacity or other.

It was not likely that this particular one would prove an exception to the general rule.

He would therefore be left more to himself, and he would have a better opportunity of making his escape, for his captors would be compelled to relax their vigilance.

This was a pleasing anticipation for Jack; and he had, moreover, another and distinct cause for congratulation.

His execution would not take place on the morrow, that was certain; for, if so, he would have received an intimation to that effect from either the Governor or the Ordinary.

In fact, the latter would have been compelled to do so.

That, then, was all right; and so, with a more comfortable feeling about his heart, and his mind full of the hope that he should be able to achieve a third escape, Jack closed his eyes and dropped off into a profound sleep, from which he awoke just as the first faint rays of daylight were creeping into his cell.

CHAPTER CCLXII.

JACK SHEPPARD FINDS IT TO HIS ADVANTAGE TO ALLOW SIR JAMES THORNHILL TO PAINT HIS PORTRAIT.

HASTILY rising, he resumed his fetters, and was only just in time, for he heard the tread of footsteps outside while he was in the act of concealing the nail between the stones, when the door was unlocked.

He assumed his old position, however, when the turnkey entered.

It was his purveyor.

A good breakfast was ordered, and when it was brought in Jack asked the man to stay and share the meal with him.

The turnkey looked at the tempting viands with hungry eyes, but declared that he dare not, for if he did he would be deprived of the privilege of waiting upon him.

"The sessions commence to-day, do they not?" asked Jack, carelessly.

"They were to have done so," replied the man.

"And will they not?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"I can hardly tell you, but somehow or other they have been put off."

"Till when?"

"Till Wednesday."

"Oh! That is very strange, is it not?"

"No, not very. It depends sometimes upon whether the list of prisoners is light or heavy."

"And is it light this time?"

"Very so! They will have plenty of time to try them all if they begin on Wednesday."

This was all the information which Jack could elicit, though what little there was was important.

He would have to defer his attempt for two days longer.

After breakfast, Jack sat for some time in deep thought; but he was interrupted by the opening of the door.

The Governor and some other figures appeared upon the threshold.

Mr. Noakes bowed low at every step as he ushered these persons into the cell.

Jack looked at them in surprise.

He was more astonished when he saw a youth appear who carried a number of curious articles.

"This way, Sir James!" said Mr. Noakes. "This way, if you please! Be good enough to walk this way, Sir James! This is the cell, and there is the prisoner."

Mr. Noakes ceased bowing and speaking at the same time, and pointed to Jack Sheppard with his finger.

The gentleman who had been addressed as Sir James inclined his head slightly.

Jack looked at him, and wondered what business a baronet could have with him.

As he looked, however, he could not avoid feeling pleased with the frank and good-tempered expression which appeared upon this gentleman's countenance.

"My name is Thornhill," he said—"Sir James Thornhill. I am a painter; and by the express desire of persons whom I dare not name I have been commissioned to visit you and, if you will allow me, to paint your portrait."

"Paint my portrait?" said Jack, in the utmost astonishment.

"Yes, paint your portrait!" interrupted the Governor. "What do you think of that, Jack? There's an honour for you!"

Jack turned round, as though to show his contempt.

His first impulse was to refuse to sit to have his portrait taken; but a thought struck him, and he hesitated.

It might be of benefit to him.

At any rate, he had an opportunity of having a little revenge upon the Governor.

So, without actually making up his mind as to what he should do, he made a very low bow as he said:

"Sir James, I am much obliged to you, but if we are to have any conversation, or come to any understanding with each other, you must order that meddling fellow to quit the cell!"

He pointed to the Governor.

Sir James Thornhill looked about him in surprise.

The Governor fairly shook with passion.

Indeed, his rage was so extreme that he could not for the life of him utter a single word.

"I am really not in a position to give orders here!" said Sir James Thornhill, in reply to Jack, "though I should be very glad to meet your wishes in any way I possibly could. I will, however, if his presence is displeasing to you, request the Governor to leave us by ourselves."

"By no means!" said Mr. Noakes, at length finding his voice—"by no means! I cannot consent to such a thing! Sir James, I should be afraid—yes, afraid to leave you in the cell alone with such a desperate malefactor!"

"You need have no fear, Sir James; I never yet broke my word, and, I assure you, you have nothing whatever to fear from me!"

The painter looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"I am sorry," he said, "to find that you are not on good terms with each other—I do not know what to do!"

"Send him out, the scoundrel that he is! and we shall be able to agree, I am certain."

Now, when Sir James had been commissioned to paint Jack Sheppard's portrait, it was stated that in all probability they would have a good deal of trouble in getting him to consent; and, rather than he should fail, all possible concessions were to be made, short of any that would contribute to his release.

Sir James was therefore perplexed.

He fancied from his manner that the prisoner was by no means averse to the proceeding, the only obstacle being the presence of Mr. Noakes.

This was especially aggravating, because he could not compel the Governor to leave, as he had an undoubted right to be there.

Mr. Noakes was furious.

"Scoundrel!" he cried, "I'll give you, scoundrel!"

"You had best stand off!" said Jack, in a threatening tone of voice, and waving his fetters ominously as he spoke.

The Governor drew back.

Sir James Thornhill touched him on the arm and whispered to him earnestly.

What was said Jack did not know.

At first, however, the Governor shook his head violently, and almost refused to listen to what was said to him, but by degrees he calmed down, and eventually quitted the cell.

As he passed Jack on his way to the door he shook his fist at him in a menacing and violent manner, as he said:

"You shall suffer for this, you young spark, never fear! Just you wait, and you see if you won't repent! Ha, ha! We shall see!"

With these words the Governor retired.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Jack turned towards Sir James Thornhill with an unruffled countenance.

"I am here, sir," he said, "to answer your best pleasure! What is it you desire?"

"I wish you—not on behalf of myself, but on behalf of those by whom I have been sent—to give me a sitting for your portrait."

"If I consent," said Jack, "what advantage will it be to me?"

"It will answer your purpose quite as well as to refuse. I am not in a position to offer you any particular advantages. If you consent you will please certain powerful persons, and I will do what I can for your benefit."

"Agreed, then!" said Jack, across whose mind a sudden thought had glanced. "It is a bargain! I have never had my portrait painted, and I can't refuse the honour!"

The celebrated painter hardly knew what to make of the tone of voice with which these words were uttered, so different were they to the last, but he was not in a position to question that, and he simply made a sign to the youth who accompanied him to make his preparations.

This young man attracted a great deal of Jack's attention.

There was something in his face which he liked, and he fancied he would commiserate him in his unfortunate position.

The young man was Sir James Thornhill's apprentice. His name was William Hogarth.

The world well knows how he excelled his master.

At that time Hogarth exhibited very little of that genius which was to make him remembered to all posterity.

He was nothing but a humble apprentice, and only acquainted with the low rudiments of the art of painting.

Quietly and unostentatiously he unpacked the different articles which he had brought with him, and Jack Sheppard saw that they consisted of an easel, a piece of blank canvas stretched upon a frame, and a box containing a palette and brushes and colours.

The preparations were soon made, and the painter sat down to his task.

Jack stood quietly enough in the required position for some time.

Sir James made rapid progress with his work, and enlivened the time by conversing with Jack Sheppard, in whom, in consequence of his daring achievements, the painter, like all the rest of the world, felt an uncommon degree of interest.

This incident of the portrait is no fiction.

The painting, indeed, is to this day in existence, and many prints have been copied from it.

On the occasion the following stanzas appeared in the *British Journal* of November the 28th 1724.

"Thornhill, 'tis thine to gild with fame
Th' obscure, and raise the humble name;
To make the form elude the grave,
And Sheppard from oblivion save.

Thy life, in vain, the wretch implores,
An' exile to the farthest shores;
Thy pencil brings a kind reprieve,
And bids the dying robber live.

This piece to latest times shall stand,
And show the wonders of thy hand:
Thus former masters grac'd their name,
And gave egregious robbers fame.

Apelles Alexander drew;
Cæsar is to Aurelius due;
Cromwell in Lily's works doth shine;
And Sheppard, Thornhill, lives in thine."

At length Sir James stated that he had done for the present, but that he should pay him another visit.

"Sir James," said Jack, in an imploring voice, "I have done all that you desired, and that emboldens me to make a request to you!"

"What is it? If it is in my power I will grant it."

"I want a—"

"No tool to assist you to escape!" interrupted the painter. "I have pledged my most solemn word of honour that I would not supply you with anything, and I cannot break my word!"

"I am sorry for that, Sir James—I was in hopes—"

"What?"

"That you would have given me a file."

"A file?"

"Yes, a file, and no matter how small a one."

"What good would it be to you?"

"It would enable me to escape!"

"My good fellow, listen to me! I am pleased with you, and therefore I give you this piece of earnest and good advice. Abandon all hopes of making your escape! Such a thing is impossible, even if you had a thousand files!"

"Do you think so, sir?"

"I am sure of it!"

"Then where can be the harm of giving me a file? But look you, sir! Give me one, and I will lay any wager you like that in a week after I receive it I am free!"

"No, no! I cannot—indeed I cannot listen to any such request! I have told you I have pledged my word!—but, Hogarth?"

"Yes, Sir James!"

"You have pledged your word—have you not?"

"No, sir!"

"No? Not pledged your word?"

"Certainly not, sir—no one asked me!"

"Oh, indeed! Ah—well, Mr. Sheppard—"

"Yes, Sir James!"

"The light has quite a curious effect as it streams into the cell—has it not?"

"Very, sir!" answered Jack, who thought the great painter must be a little insane.

"Ah, well, I am going to study it for a few moments, and as Hogarth has not pledged his word, it is possible you may be able to persuade him—you understand?"

And Sir James, having made this compromise, folded his arms and looked out of the grated aperture in Jack's cell with so much intentness that for a moment or two, so wrapped was he in his study, that he became quite oblivious of what passed.

Jack understood him, and so did the apprentice.

But Hogarth, although he had a desire to serve Jack as well as he could, was determined not to commit himself too far.

So when Jack renewed his entreaty for a file, he said:

"I am very sorry to refuse you. But my duty will not allow me to do such a thing—it is impossible!"

Jack ground his teeth with disappointment.

The apprentice continued:

"But I have a very bad habit of carrying files and such things about me; and I have had my pockets picked before now, especially those in the skirt of my coat."

"Enough, enough!" said Jack, in a voice of deep thankfulness; "I understand you."

Hogarth walked away, and Sir James Thornhill left the window out of which he had been gazing so intently.

"A very curious effect indeed!" he said. "I shall certainly avail myself of it in one of my next paintings. Now, Hogarth, my lad, pack up."

The apprentice obeyed; and then the painter, turning to Jack, said:

"Thanks for your sitting! We shall be here again tomorrow, and I think that will do. But my apprentice carries such dangerous articles about him! You must

upon no account attempt to pick his pockets. Good morning!"

"Good morning, sir!" said Jack. "Heaven bless you, for I cannot! I am a free man!"

"Hush, hush! I should not have acted as I have if I thought you stood the least chance of making your escape. Good morning!"

CHAPTER CCCLXIII.

TAKES A GLANCE AT THE PROCEEDINGS OF BLUESKIN, AND EXPLAINS THE MYSTERY OF WILD'S EXTRAORDINARY EXULTATION.

WE fancy the reader wonders quite as much as Jack Sheppard what was the reason of Jonathan Wild's exultation.

What had occurred on Saturday that had the effect of keeping him so late before he paid his accustomed visit to the lonely prisoner in his cell?

It was something of very great importance, and the last thing that Jack would have thought of.

We will go back, then, and relate what has occurred.

We left Blueskin in a little public-house in Westminster, where he had taken refuge after his flight from Mother Robotham's.

It was an out-of-the-way place, and he felt that he should be in tolerable safety, for there was little fear of his pursuers being able to track him to this place.

For a long while he remained immovable.

He was in deep thought.

There was much to perplex him.

Like Jack, he knew not what to think of the account which had been given him of the departure of Edgworth Bess from the infamous den in Spring Gardens.

He arrived, however, at the conclusion that there was some misconception somewhere—that he had either been told more or less than the truth.

That she had left he felt certain; and having this point to start from, he occupied himself with thinking what the poor girl would be most likely to do if she found herself at liberty to go where she listed.

This puzzled him for a long [time, but at length he started and muttered:

"I have it now! Nothing can be more simple! The thought ought to have occurred to me before. This young man they spoke of she doubtless persuaded to assist her to escape; and then, being anxious to learn something of us, or having nowhere else to go, she would make her way to Johnson's, at the Black Lion, in Drury Lane. That is it, I am certain."

As the reader has already been placed in possession of all the incidents which occurred to poor Edgworth Bess, he will immediately be able to see how far Blueskin was right, and how far he was wrong.

In the first portion of his surmise he came remarkably near the truth.

In the latter part he wandered away from it.

Still, the thought having once taken hold of his mind, appeared to be so plausible and natural, that it is not to be wondered at that he felt so confident as he did.

He felt, too, that he could not rest until he had fully satisfied himself upon the point.

To start just at present, with so many on the look-out for him, was too dangerous, and so he was forced to control his impatience for a time.

He had chosen the most obscure corner in the room, and here he resolved to sit until the heat of the chase had evaporated.

It was early morning, [so he had plenty of time before him.

But his thoughts were not idle.

His brain was busy all the while in thinking upon the best course of action he could adopt.

Time passed.

Hour after hour glided by, and still he was undisturbed.

Still he did not move.

As he had remained so long, he felt that he could not do better than stay until the brief winter's day had come to a close.

Then, under cover of the friendly darkness, he would be able to repair to his destination.

This was a wise determination upon his part.

As soon as it was fairly dark, he rose, paid for what he had had, and took his departure.

He made his way to his destination in a devious, circuitous manner—at one time bending towards it, and at another appearing to go in a contrary direction.

But Blueskin knew his ground, and after a time he emerged from a court into Drury Lane.

It was at the lower part of this thoroughfare, and not far from the Black Lion, that he appeared.

Two steps took him to the door, and he entered without hesitation.

The same scene of revelry was going on.

Every night was just the same; and although it was so long since he had visited the place, Blueskin could detect no alteration.

Passing by the door which opened into the room where the revellers were assembled, he directed his steps towards the bar.

This place was private, and very few were privileged to enter it.

But Blueskin was one of the favoured number.

He placed his hand upon the knob of the door, turned it, and entered.

There was no one in the little room save an untidy, dirty servant, who was doing something at the fireplace.

She was a small, thin creature, with face and hands as black as a negro's.

Here eyes, too, were large and black, and she fixed them steadfastly upon Blueskin as soon as he came in, and rose from her knees.

Ha, however, paid but little attention to her.

Seating himself in a chair, he inquired for the landlord, and bade her tell him he was wanted.

She departed with great alacrity, and in a moment afterwards Johnson entered.

He was both surprised and pleased to see his old friend Blueskin.

A long time had elapsed since they had last seen each other, and their greeting was a warm one, for they had been firm friends for many years.

"You can, perhaps, guess what has brought me here?" said Blueskin abruptly.

"Nay, that I cannot."

"Cannot! Has not someone arrived here before me?"

"Someone! Who? Speak out; I do not understand!"

"Alas, alas!"

"Why do you cry alas?"

"I find that I am mistaken."

"In what? Speak freely, Blueskin. What is amiss?"

"To be brief with you, I expected to find Edgworth Bess here. Are you sure that she has not arrived?"

"Quite sure."

Blueskin groaned.

"Then I know not what has become of her," he said "Heaven help her!"

"Come, Blueskin!" said Johnson, "tell me all that has taken place. You know you can trust me, and you are safe here, for Jonathan Wild has not paid me a troublesome visit for a long time."

"We have not been near the place lately."

"I suppose that is the reason. But come, tell me what has happened! It may perhaps be in my power to be of assistance to you in some way or other."

"Oh, Johnson, things have all gone wrong—one misfortune has followed another. Jack Sheppard is a prisoner in Newgate, and Edgworth Bess we have lost, and know not where to look for her!"

"The first bit of news I was already in possession of; but about the latter I knew nothing until a minute or two ago. We must talk over this. But you look sick and faint. You must have some refreshment."

"I shall be glad of a little food, Johnson. It is a long time since I have taken any."

"It seems so by your looks."

"It is a long while; and perhaps when I have had a good meal I shall feel in better spirits."

"To be sure you will. Here, wait a minute, and I will see to it. Martha!—Martha!"

But no Martha replied.

Johnson repeated the summons in a louder tone.

The same result.

"Curse that girl!" he said—"I'll discharge her. She is never here when she is wanted!"

Blueskin took but little notice of this, nor did Johnson appear to attach any importance to her absence.

Yet it concerned them materially, and it would have been well if he had looked after her.

She had not long been in his employ; and from the scant satisfaction she gave, she was not likely to remain.

So Johnson did without her.

Little did they imagine how she was engaged at that very moment.

We have said that she looked up when Blueskin entered.

She fixed her large, coal-black eyes upon his countenance with an intentness that would have aroused his suspicions had he been less pre-occupied than he was.

At his bidding she told Johnson that he was wanted by someone in the bar, and having watched the landlord into that place, she stole to the door and placed her ear against the keyhole.

In this listening attitude she did not long remain.

With a bright glitter in her eye and an expression of great satisfaction on her face, she rose and sauntered to the front door of the inn.

As soon as she reached it she stood a moment, and then, confident that no one within the house was watching her motions, she darted off into the darkness, and was in a moment lost to sight in the court on the opposite side of the street, down which she hastened.

On she went through the streets, with her head uncovered and her ragged apparel streaming in the wind behind her.

On she went, threading her way through mazy courts with marvellous facility, darting across busy thoroughfares, and dodging through the ranks of the pedestrians.

Her course was almost a straight one, and at length, panting and exhausted with her exertions, she emerged into the Old Bailey, near the Snow Hill end.

Across this street she hurried, and round the corner of the prison into Newgate Street.

Then she paused for a moment before a house.

Looked at it attentively, and finally sprang up the steps.

She seized the knocker and executed a vigorous peal.

The house was Jonathan Wild's house, and the mystery of her making her way hither will shortly be elucidated.

The portal of the thief-taker's abode was always quickly opened.

The man on the lock looked surprised when he saw who it was.

He was about to close the door against her, but she glided in like a shadow, and demanded an immediate interview with Jonathan Wild.

She was told he was out.

This intelligence filled her with dismay, but she implored that he might be immediately sent for.

The man hardly knew what would be best for him to do, but finally he determined to send a messenger to Wild, as he happened to be close at hand.

A janizary was called and sent after him.

They had not far to send, for Jonathan had only gone to pay one of his frequent and accustomed visits to Jack Sheppard in his cell.

The janizary who had been sent met Wild just as he was leaving the prison, and at once delivered his message.

Jonathan hastened homeward at an unusual speed.

Upon entering the hall he seemed to recognise the girl at the first glance, and he beckoned to her to follow him.

He led the way into the little office and closed the door.

"Oh, Mr. Wild," said the girl, gaspingly—"he's come!"

"Who's come?"

"Blueskin!"

"Impossible!"

"No, sir—he's come! You told me to let you know, and promised me five pounds. Give it to me—he's come!"

"But when?" asked the thief-taker, who seemed to doubt the truth of what the girl said.

"A little while ago. I was a-lighting the fire in the bar, and he opened the door and came in. He asked for Johnson, and I knowed him in a minute!"

"Well?"

"Johnson went to him, and I left them talking to each other about Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess. Make haste, Mr. Wild, for I don't think he's going to stay!"

"You shall have the five pounds, girl, if I find what you have told me is correct."

Jonathan did not wait to ask any further questions, but going into the hall, summoned all his janizaries about him.

As for the girl, she was to follow them.

Hastily bidding his men get their weapons in readiness, as they might have some stiff work to do, he proceeded to arm himself.

In a few moments they were all in the street, and at a rapid pace he led the way towards the Black Lion in Drury Lane.

The thief-taker's heart bounded exultingly, for now he felt no doubt he should accomplish the capture of Blueskin, and then he should have things all in his own hands, and be completely master of the situation.

Away they went, taking the nearest and most direct route to their destination, preceded by the girl, who outstripped them all.

This girl was the daughter of one of Wild's janizaries, and entirely devoted to his interests.

He had drilled her well into what she was to do.

She was to go to the Black Lion, and obtain a situation there as a servant.

But she was to make it her especial business to watch for the appearance of either Blueskin, Jack Sheppard, or Edgworth Bess.

As soon as any one of them appeared at the inn, she was to make her way with all possible speed to Jonathan's house, and give the information, and she was to have five pounds for her trouble.

This sum seemed to the poor girl to be nothing short of a fortune.

She was only too delighted at having the chance to earn such a sum in such a manner; and we have seen how readily she had started off to give her information when she had assured herself that it was really Blueskin who had entered.

She recognised his features and his general bearing, for Jonathan had been exceedingly careful to give her a full and perfect description of the appearance of all three of those persons whose capture he so much desired to effect.

CHAPTER CCLXIV.

JONATHAN WILD MAKES A CLOSE SEARCH IN THE BLACK LION, AND DISCOVERS THE HIDING-PLACE ON THE STAIRS.

WITHOUT a thought that danger was so close at hand, Blueskin and Johnson sat together in the bar, talking to each other and endeavouring to come to some definite idea as to what would be the best thing to be done.

Knowing that he could trust the landlord, Blueskin had not scrupled to confide everything to him, and having done so he waited with some impatience and anxiety for his opinion.

It had taken Blueskin some time to relate all that had taken place, and Johnson was just hesitating what to say when someone entered and came to the bar counter.

It was one of Johnson's best customers, and one who was under deep obligations to the landlord.

"Joe!" he said—"Joe, come here in a minute—I have something important to tell you!"

There was something in the man's voice and manner which made Johnson instantly suspect that something was amiss.

"What is the matter, Benton?"

"Well, it may be nothing. It just depends whether you have got anyone particular in the house!"

"How so?"

"Because if you have, look fly—that's all!"

"Speak out, man! What is the matter?"

"Why, Jonathan Wild, with a whole troop of his rascals at his back, and led on by that black devil of a servant of yours, is making straight for the place, and in another minute will be here!"

Blueskin started to his feet upon receipt of this intelligence.

"I have been betrayed!" he said.

"Hush!" exclaimed Johnson. "It's that little black-faced imp! If you remember, she did not answer when I called. Quick!—follow me!—fear nothing!—all will be well! I will hide you where Jonathan Wild, if he was ten times cleverer than he is, would never find you!"

While speaking, the landlord led the way to the staircase.

Blueskin followed him closely.

They were only just in time, for at that very moment Wild was placing his men in various positions, where they could command a good view of the house.

"I am going to hide you," said Johnson, "where I once hid Jack Sheppard when the hottest pursuit was made after him!"

"And he was not found?"

"Oh no, never fear! Do not be alarmed—you were never safer than you are at this moment, and if you will only secrete yourself in the place I shall point out, you may laugh at Jonathan Wild and his impotent search!"

"Where is this place?"

"Here!"

Johnson paused on the staircase.

"Here?" repeated Blueskin, with surprise.

"Yes, here!"

He stooped down as he spoke, and took hold of the top of the stair in the manner we have already described in the hundred and first chapter of this narrative.

Blueskin was naturally enough astounded when he saw the landlord draw away the top part of the stair like a shelf.

"Now then!" cried Johnson—"quick! in with you! I can hear Jonathan below! The place is lined with felt, so you will find it comfortable enough, and you will have no difficulty about breathing."

"It looks like a coffin!"

"Never mind the looks! Get in quick, or it will be too late! When I have pushed this sliding piece of wood back into its proper position you will be safe, and as soon as it is prudent to do so I will come up and release you."

Blueskin made no more demur, though he rather shrank from entering the coffin-like place which was disclosed.

He found, however, that the place was much more comfortable than he could have believed possible.

With all speed, Johnson pushed the sliding piece of board back into its proper place, and then precipitately descended the stairs, for a tremendous hubbub from below reached his ears.

No sooner did he make his appearance than Jonathan yelled out:

"Seize him! Seize that man! Clap the darbies on him—he is a prisoner!"

A dozen men sprang forward to obey this order, and before he knew what had taken place, Johnson found himself securely handcuffed.

"By what authority do you do this?" he asked. "Upon what charge do you make me a prisoner?"

"Upon a very good charge, my friend!"

"What is it?"

"That of harbouring felons in your house."

"Where are they?"

"We shall find them!"

"You must do so before you venture to make me a prisoner!"

"Nothing of the kind. I want to save you all the trouble I can, so a couple of my men will remain here to take charge of you!"

Johnson knew it would be quite useless to say a word, and so he submitted without further bother to his captor's pleasure.

In the meantime, Jonathan Wild, at the head of his disorderly crew, dashed up the staircase.

His motive for this was because Johnson had descended and he jumped to the conclusion that Blueskin was above, and that Johnson had just come down, after putting him in some place of concealment.

On the first landing he placed several of the men, and continued his course upwards.

Blueskin heard their feet upon the stair beneath which he lay, and his heart trembled lest they should discover any difference in the feel or sound.

But all seemed well, and the thief-taker and his band made their way to the next storey.

Above that were the attics, and then the roof.

Jonathan decided upon a thorough search, and so kept

on until he came to the roof, on which he posted one of his men to keep watch.

This man could signal to those who were posted in the street, to whom he was clearly visible, in case anything should be amiss.

The attics were closely searched in every corner, but without result.

No trace of Blueskin could be found.

Here, however, another man was left, while Wild and the rest descended to the next flight.

Here the same course was adopted, but their close search met with no success whatever.

It never occurred to Wild to look underneath the stairs.

When they descended to the first floor, Blueskin's hopes revived, and he began to participate in the confidence which Johnson felt.

Reluctantly, Jonathan was compelled to come down to the ground floor again.

A faint smile of triumph appeared on the landlord's lips when he descended.

But he banished it quickly.

Jonathan was furious, and yet he dissembled.

He called Johnson aside.

"Look here!" he said, in a low voice. "This will prove a serious thing to you. I have most certain knowledge that Blueskin is in the house, and I will not quit it until I have found him! I shall take you with me, and it will be the ruin of you when it turns out that you have been concealing Blueskin in your house!"

"Jonathan Wild!"

"That's my name; what do you want?"

"Why, you can spare your breath, that's all! Your fine speeches are quite thrown away upon me! I know nothing of the man you want, and you are heartily welcome to look for him as long as you like! When you have found him, then it will be time for me to talk and make terms with you!"

"Oh, will it?" said the thief-taker, in a towering passion.

"We will see about that, Mr. Landlord. I am certain he is here! I am certain, too, that you have concealed him somewhere upstairs; I could tell that by the smile on your lips when I came down without finding him!"

Jonathan shrugged his shoulders, but made no further reply.

"Now, landlord," continued Wild, "look here! If you have got an atom of sense, you will be able to see that it will answer your purpose very much better to keep in with me than with this Jack Sheppard lot. Just put me on the scent where I am to find Blueskin, and I will overlook all the past, and will take care that you don't get into any trouble over this present affair!"

"I am not afraid of doing so!" said Johnson, resolutely.

"I tell you again, I know nothing of the man you want. If you can find him here, well and good. I know nothing about it—that's all I can say!"

Jonathan Wild turned away with a diabolical curse upon his lips.

He found Johnson quite impracticable.

He had no resource but to recommence his search.

Upstairs he went again, in a state of mind of which the reader may be able to form some feeble idea.

He renewed his search with double strictness, but as he looked everywhere except under the particular stair where Blueskin was concealed, he found nothing, and we need not trouble the reader with the details of his unsuccessful search.

At his wits' end what to do next, Wild all at once be-thought himself of the girl who had brought him the information.

He recollected that since he entered the house he had seen nothing of her, and he now despatched one of his janizaries in search of her, with instructions to bring her to him at once, should she be found.

While the man was absent, the thief-taker occupied himself with examining the places which the men had searched.

The janizary who had been sent after the little servant-girl found her in Drury Lane, standing outside the house, for she was afraid to enter.

Under the protection of this man, however, she was safe from any violence which the inhabitants of the Black Lion might offer to her, and she was led upstairs on to the landing upon which the thief-taker stood.

He beckoned her towards him.

"You are sure Blueskin was here when you left?"

"Yes. Have you not found him?" asked the girl, fearful that she should lose the reward.

"No, I cannot find him, though he is in the house I am confident, but hidden somewhere.

The girl clapped her hands, and her face brightened.

"I have it!" she said.

"What?—what?"

"I know where he is hidden!"

Jonathan shook her roughly.

"You—you? Where? Tell me where?"

"You hurt me! Let me go! I won't tell you if you don't!"

Wild released his hold immediately.

"Now—where?"

"If you find him where I say, how much will you give me?"

"Ten—twenty pounds!"

"Twenty pounds?"

"Yes, but be quick and tell me!"

"You promise me twenty pounds?"

"Yes, if you are quick, and tell me without further delay, not without."

"Well, then, I heard Johnson talking once about a hiding-place in the stairs."

"In the stairs?"

"Yes."

"Well—well, what more?"

"I would not rest until I had found it out."

"You did find it out?"

"Yes."

"Where is it, then? Tell me at once, and you shall have, not twenty pounds, but fifty!"

The girl gasped for breath.

"The fifth stair," she said, at length—"the fifth stair!"

Jonathan called his men around him.

"Show it me!" he said.

The girl went without hesitation to the stair with the movable top, beneath which Blueskin lay.

"You must take hold of it by the edge and pull it," she said. "It will slide off then!"

"Come out of the way, then!"

The girl sprang lightly up the staircase, and crouching down, looked eagerly at Wild and his men.

They had heard the latter part of his communication, and knew what to do.

Blueskin, too, had heard every syllable, and there he lay as though in a tomb, unable to help himself in the least, for the lid of the stair could not be moved by the person within.

There was but one thing he could do.

He was already discovered, and as soon as the top was drawn off he would spring up, and endeavour to take them by surprise.

The janizaries, instructed by the girl, took hold of the edge of the stair, and drew it off.

True to his purpose, Blueskin started up with a suddenness that had in it something marvellous.

But this was exactly what the janizaries expected, and they were prepared for it accordingly, and seized him tightly.

A tremendous struggle ensued, the result of which was that all rolled down to the landing.

Jonathan was standing here, and he now lent his aid towards securing Blueskin.

But they had a difficult task to perform.

He was determined not to give in to his foes without a most desperate struggle, although the odds were so fearfully against him.

But with so many foes he stood but a poor chance, and finally he was secured.

Jonathan's face lighted up with an expression of demoniac joy.

"Ha, ha!" he cried. "Caught at last!—caught at last! Ha, ha! I knew I should have you! Caught at last!"

The men now forced Blueskin to descend the stairs.

He was completely exhausted by his struggles, and Wild stood with his drawn sword in a threatening attitude, so to escape a serious wound he suffered himself to be led down.

CHAPTER CCCLXV.

BLUESKIN IS TAKEN TO NEWGATE BY JONATHAN WILD, AND HENRY FIELDING, THE MAGISTRATE, COMMITS HIM FOR TRIAL.

THE thief-taker's visage expanded into a grin when he thought of the triumph he had achieved over Johnson, the landlord, and he went downstairs with the air and manner of one who was thoroughly and completely satisfied with himself.

He blew his whistle shrilly, which would let all the men know that the capture had been effected, and that it was unnecessary for them to keep a look-out any longer.

It was also a signal to them to repair without delay to the thief-taker, and receive further instructions from him.

Johnson heard the uproar above, and guessed what had taken place, and yet he could scarcely bring himself to believe that the hiding-place upon the security of which he had prided himself so much had been discovered.

He heard the trampling of feet on the staircase, and fixed his eyes steadfastly in that direction.

The first glimpse he caught of Jonathan Wild's face was sufficient to convince him that what he had feared was true.

"Ha, ha, Johnson!" Wild cried. "Perhaps you would like to come to terms now? But it is too late, my friend, and I will take care that you pay dearly for this little game!"

Then turning to his men, he continued:

"Keep him close prisoner; he shall accompany his friend to the old stone jug!"

By this time, Blueskin, completely surrounded by men, had reached the passage.

He felt that resistance was worse than useless, and therefore had the good sense to remain quite still.

He trusted that a more favourable opportunity of making a vigorous effort would presently occur.

This, however, was a very frail hope.

We know full well how Wild had set his heart upon Blueskin's capture.

We also know that it was material to the success of his plans that Blueskin should be lodged in Newgate.

Therefore we think that his chances of having any opportunity afforded him are so small as to amount to nothing.

Yet he did not despair.

Jonathan was determined to lose no time.

He ordered one of his men to call a hackney-coach, and when this drew up before the door, Blueskin was compelled to enter it.

Jonathan Wild got in along with him.

As many janizaries as could squeeze themselves into the vehicle followed.

The remainder were ordered to proceed to Newgate on foot, and to take Johnson thither with them, for Wild was determined to punish him for concealing Blueskin in the house.

The thief-taker sat opposite to his prisoner, who was well secured, and so crushed by the men on either side of him that he could not move a limb.

With such a heavy load, the hackney-coach made but slow progress, and they were a long time in reaching the prison.

Upon their arrival, Jonathan discovered that those who had come on foot had reached there first.

The intelligence was at once communicated that a very important prisoner had been captured, and preparations were made accordingly.

Jonathan was certain that an attempt would now be made to escape, and he redoubled his vigilance.

The event proved that he was perfectly correct.

No sooner had he descended from the vehicle than Blueskin made a most desperate effort to get free.

But it was in vain.

His foes were too numerous for a single man to contend against, and he was hurried up the steps into the vestibule despite his strenuous resistance.

Then the door was closed, and he was safe.

The Governor now appeared, and when he saw who stood before him his delight knew no bounds.

"Ha, ha!" he cried, as he rubbed his hands together in that disagreeable manner which was peculiar to him—



FIGG THE PRIZEFIGHTER PAYS A VISIT TO JACK SHEPPARD IN NEWGATE.

"we shall have a rare session this time, Mr. Wild! Never saw Newgate honoured as it is now!"

He made a mock bow as he concluded this speech.

"We shall have a rare show at Tyburn, Mr. Noakes!" said Wild, with a grin.

The Governor laughed; and then, doubtless considering that he had sufficiently indulged in this pleasantry, he gave instructions for Blueskin's confinement in a strong dungeon in a quarter of the prison as far removed from that in which Jack Sheppard was as possibly could be.

Jonathan and the Governor both saw him carefully bestowed.

He was thoroughly searched, and every article that was in his pockets taken from him.

Then they chained him to the wall, and fettered him much in the same way.

In short, nothing was left undone that would in any way conduce to his safe keeping.

Then they retired, and left him to the solitude and silence of his dungeon.

No. 75.—BLUESKIN.

It was agreed and strictly enjoined that Jack Sheppard should be kept in absolute ignorance of all that had taken place.

Upon no account was he to be informed that Blueskin had been made prisoner.

That knowledge was to be kept from him to the last.

Thus it happened that Blueskin was in the chapel on the Sunday along with the other prisoners without one seeing the other.

We have described how Jack was placed in his pew before the arrival of the rest, and taken from it after all had departed.

Little did Jack dream that Blueskin was, like himself, a prisoner within those walls.

He pictured him at liberty, taking measures to procure his release, and watching over the safety of Edgworth Bess.

What words could describe the exultation which now reigned paramount in the heart of that bold, bad man, Jonathan Wild?

He felt that the hour of his triumph had at length arrived.

No longer was he to be vexed and chafed by the perpetual failure of his schemes.

All was accomplished.

Edgworth Bess was a prisoner in his own house, watched over by his son.

Blueskin and Jack Sheppard were confined in Newgate, and so well guarded and closely watched as to make escape a matter of impossibility.

The sessions would come on on Wednesday.

Monday was the proper day; but this postponement suited Jonathan exactly.

It enabled him to get a case ready against Blueskin, and have him tried in readiness for the next hanging-day, when he should have the inexpressible gratification of seeing both swing together at Tyburn.

In the meantime, however, he had much to do.

When he paid Jack his last visit, it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from triumphing over him by telling him how affairs stood; but he had the prudence to vanquish this inclination.

He went home, and on the way felicitated himself that at length all was accomplished.

Nay, not all.

He recollected that all was not done.

There were the papers.

Those papers of which he had gained possession with so much difficulty, and which had disappeared in so mysterious a manner.

He would have to recover those; but he hoped that ere long they would turn up.

Little did he think that his own hopeful son had concealed them in order to answer his own purposes.

Somehow, after their last interview, Jonathan felt inclined to place confidence in his son.

He was indeed completely deceived by his well-acted indignation.

His first care upon reaching home was to ascertain whether Edgworth Bess was safe.

He was answered in the affirmative, so far as her being in his power and in the house was concerned; but she was suffering from a raging fever which had seized upon her, brought on, it seemed, by excitement and leaving her room too soon.

About this Jonathan cared little when Mr. Suoxall told him that there was no immediate danger.

He had made up his mind not to trouble himself with her until he had seen Blueskin and Jack Sheppard disposed of.

Then he should be quite free from all fear of interruption, which would be much better than taking any active steps while they were alive.

But this close contemplation of success did not make Wild feel so comfortable as he thought it would.

The many failures and reverses he had met with made him fearful that even this time he was going to be disappointed.

Whether his forebodings were groundless, time alone can show.

On the Monday morning when Jack Sheppard had his extraordinary interview with Sir James Thornhill, Blueskin was taken before a magistrate.

It so happened that this magistrate was Henry Fielding, who lives for ever in his novels.

He had a most invincible dislike to Jonathan Wild, and he was never so pleased as when he could check or thwart him in some of his villainies.

On the present occasion, however, no opportunity offered itself.

He well knew that for a long time past warrants had been issued for the apprehension of Blueskin, and a large reward had been offered by the Government for his capture.

When, therefore, Jonathan brought him up and preferred his charge, and some other persons came forward and swore to his identity, the worthy magistrate could do no more than commit him to take his trial at the next sessions.

This was all Jonathan Wild required.

This took place on Monday.

The sessions had been postponed till Wednesday, so there would be no delay in bringing Blueskin to trial.

Wild of course counted upon sentence of death being

passed upon him, and in this calculation he was unquestionably correct.

When this little preliminary step had been taken, Wild felt somewhat easier in his mind.

Still he was continually haunted by the dread that at the last moment something would go wrong, and affairs would resume their wonted aspect.

Every care was taken that Blueskin should be led back to Newgate in safety, and he was at length lodged in his cell and heavily ironed as before.

Since his imprisonment a feeling of deep dejection had come over Blueskin.

He could not shake it off, though he strove hard to do so.

His mind was weighed down with a presentiment that all was over—that Jonathan Wild would triumph.

He was a helpless prisoner, so closely watched that it made the bare whisper of escape a mockery.

His comrade Jack was powerless to aid him, for he was already in the same predicament.

Then there was poor Edgworth Bess, he knew not where, but more likely in the power of the thief-taker than anywhere else.

Having such thoughts as these, it is not to be wondered at that Blueskin should give way to hopeless despair.

Indeed, such a change came over him as would scarcely be credited by anyone, and those who knew him best would almost fail to recognise him.

He could see no way out of his difficulty.

Over and over again he blamed himself for relying upon the hiding-place in the stairs as he had, and yet what could he have done better?

Then he thought of Johnson, and was grieved to think of the trouble which he had brought upon him, for the offence with which he was charged was one that was heavily punished.

It will be seen, then, that, let him turn his thoughts in whichever direction he would, he was unable to perceive a single gleam of hope.

The time was short, too, before his trial came on, and with the result of it he was perfectly well acquainted.

He knew that nothing whatever would get him off—that not even the ablest counsel could procure any commutation of his sentence.

He resolved, therefore, to employ no one, but to go into court undefended.

Such a course would answer his purpose quite as well.

With his head bowed down upon his knees, and in a state of utter dejection, Blueskin passed the time which intervened between his committal and the morning of his trial.

Had it not been for the great influence of Jonathan Wild in the proper quarter, and the strenuous exertions which he made, the trial would not have taken place until next session; but he gave such an account of the danger of putting it off, and the opportunities that it would allow the prisoner of making his escape, that he gained his point, and Blueskin's trial was appointed to take place on the Friday, which was the last day, for on this occasion the calendar was lighter than it had been known to be for a long time.

Such, then, being Blueskin's unfortunate position, we will turn our thoughts to Jack Sheppard, who never for one moment dreamt that his old comrade was so close to him.

CHAPTER CCLXVI.

JACK SHEPPARD PICKS HOGARTH'S POCKET, AND MAKES AN APPOINTMENT WITH SIR JAMES THORNHILL.

AFTER the departure of Sir James Thornhill and his apprentice, William Hogarth, Jack Sheppard's heart felt much lighter than it had done since the moment of his capture.

He now saw before him the chance of achieving his freedom, for it was no lightly-made assertion to which he had given utterance when he said he should be free so soon.

There was no mistaking the meaning of his two visitors, though each strove to conceal it as much as possible.

Sir James having given his word that he would not furnish the prisoner with any weapon by which he might

effect his escape, of course incapacitated him from yielding to Jack's entreaties.

But he gave a hint to his apprentice, which was acted upon while he pretended to be particularly engaged in noting the effect of light and shade through the window in the cell.

Hogarth had shown himself not less cautious than his master, but yet Jack understood him.

When they were gone, he clasped his hands together joyfully, as he murmured:

"Oh, yes, yes; all will yet be well, in spite of the vigilance of my keepers! I shall achieve a third escape from Newgate! I think even now an abatement in their watchfulness is perceptible."

He sank down upon his seat.

"I must watch every opportunity," he continued. "To-morrow I shall receive a file; that will be Tuesday. On Wednesday the sessions will commence. I shall then be troubled less with the company of the Governor, for he will have to attend in court all day. The turnkeys, too, will have extra duty; and even Jonathan Wild—the man I have to fear above all the rest—some portion of his time will be taken up at the assizes, for there never was a sessions yet when he was not prosecutor or witness against something. All things conspire in my favour. That will be the time, and I fear not I shall accomplish my design! The grand thing will be to get rid of these perpetual visits. While they continue, I shall have no chance at all!"

With these and a thousand other thoughts did Jack Sheppard occupy himself during the day.

He was visited as usual by Jonathan and the Governor, and a crowd of people who had been actuated by their curiosity to come and gaze upon him.

But this scene need not be elaborated.

They came and gazed upon the prisoner, and left him money, and so the time passed away.

It certainly had the effect of causing the day to seem less tedious to Jack, who, nevertheless, felt dreadfully impatient for the morrow to come.

At length the last visitor took his leave; darkness filled the cell, and the prisoner was left alone.

When the time arrived for it to be safe to do so, Jack removed his fetters by the aid of the cleverly-concealed nail, and slept in tolerable comfort—certainly with more than his captors were willing that he should enjoy.

Then the morning came, which he so anxiously expected.

Long before the time he seated himself on his stone bench, and waited for the arrival of the painter.

At length he came, and it was with difficulty Jack could conceal from the observation of the turnkey the joy which his advent occasioned.

Sir James spoke kindly and freely to Jack, for, if the truth must be told, he felt some fear of him, and above all things he wished to conciliate him as much as possible.

Willingly enough Jack stood in the desired attitude, and the painter went on with his work.

About what had taken place on the preceding day not a word was said, but Jack kept a sharp look-out upon the apprentice Hogarth, in whose coat-pocket, beyond all doubt, was the little tool which he so desired to possess.

But the youth kept purposely away from Jack, for it was his intention not to allow Jack to put his hand into his pocket until the very last moment.

Jack chafed at this, for he felt that could he but have felt the file in his hand he would have been content.

Still, he did not like to say a word about it, as both his visitors remained silent.

But he fretted and fumed exceedingly.

This sitting was a much longer one than that on the preceding day, for Sir James wished to avoid a third visit to the prison.

He worked away, however, with right good will, and presently Jack had the satisfaction of hearing him say:

"I have done! Thank you—that will do! I can fill up the remainder of the portrait, without difficulty, from memory alone. What do you think of it—is it a good portrait?"

He turned the canvas as he spoke, and Jack for the first time had a glance at his work.

The face was all that could be said to be finished.

This, however, was all that Jack looked upon, and he

was absolutely astounded with the fidelity of the likeness.

"You are quite satisfied, then?" said Sir James.

"Quite!"

"I am glad of that! I wish you could see it when finished."

"Do you, sir?"

"Certainly!"

"Then I'll have a look at it!"

Sir James attempted to smile.

"When will it be finished?" continued Jack, speaking in a voice of the utmost seriousness.

"In a few days."

"Let me see! To-day is Tuesday. Will it be finished by next Monday?"

"Oh, before then!"

"And where will it be, sir?"

"That I cannot tell. What imports it that you should know?"

"Perhaps more than you imagine. Next Monday, you say, the portrait will be finished?"

"Yes!"

"And will it be at your house?"

"In all probability."

"Then, Sir James, I will take the liberty of calling upon you next Monday evening, some time between sunset and midnight, if you will be kind enough to be at home and show me the portrait!"

"Pho, pho! You must not think of such a thing. Occupy your mind with more serious matters!"

"Will you be at home, Sir James, next Monday evening—and if I call, will you show me the portrait?"

"If you call, I will!"

"You lay doubtful emphasis upon your promise; but I assure you, sir, that without fail I shall be there!"

Sir James looked rather uncomfortable, but still he felt that he could say nothing further.

"Of course," continued Jack, "I speak——"

Sir James held up his hand.

"Not a word further," he said, in a low voice. "I know what you are about to say, but for my sake pray be silent—we may be overheard!"

This was enough.

Jack was silent immediately.

"All right, sir!" he added, after a pause. "Never fear, sir, I shall call, for I am curious to a degree to see my portrait when it is finished."

While this brief and hurried conversation had been taking place, Hogarth had been busily employed in packing up the different articles, and having finished, he stooped down to the box of colours on the floor, as though about to pick it up.

He stooped down close to Jack's feet, and did so in such a manner that one of the pockets in his coat gaped open.

Jack Sheppard was quick-witted enough to perfectly understand what was meant.

In an instant he dived his hand into the pocket so temptingly open.

It contained but one article, and this he seized.

After glancing at it for a moment, he transferred it to his own pocket.

It was a small and beautifully-made steel file, with teeth which looked as though they would cut through the hardest iron like a saw will cut through wood.

As soon as Hogarth felt that Jack had taken the file, he rose to his feet with the box in his hand.

"I have had my pockets picked before now, Sir James," he said, "when they contained very valuable articles indeed; but you cannot help having things taken off you sometimes—can you?"

"Certainly not."

"It is not my fault if some one else takes anything out of my pocket. Surely I am not to blame!"

"No one would think of blaming you for a moment if you were unfortunate enough to have your pocket picked."

"I thought not, sir."

"Come, my lad, we will be off!"

"I am quite ready, sir."

"Good-bye, Jack," said Sir James. "I am much obliged to you for giving me such a patient sitting."

"Oh, don't mention it, sir—pray don't mention it! I won't wish you good-bye!"

"Why not?"

"I hope, sir, you have not forgotten next Monday night already?"

"Oh no, I have not forgotten it—but——"

"Never doubt it, sir—I shall come, and shall rely upon your honour not to hand me over to the police."

"You have nothing to fear on that account, I can assure you; but I think you had better give up all hopes of such a thing."

"Pho, pho! I shall be free long before then, but I shall have some little matters to attend to first, and I wanted to appoint a time when I should be perfectly at leisure."

Sir James looked at Jack Sheppard with the greatest amazement depicted upon his countenance.

Jack had spoken in such a cool, calm tone that he was absolutely staggered, and he looked round him once or twice to make sure that he was really in Newgate, and that what was taking place was not a dream.

"Well, well, Jack," he said, "you have done some wonderful things in your short life, I admit—I should not have painted your portrait if you had not; but if you escape from Newgate this time, you will outdo all that you have ever done before."

"I shall do it, Sir James. I am one not given to empty boasting."

"I will not say good-bye, then," said the painter.

"Certainly not; for as sure as I now say it, I shall see you on Monday!"

Sir James and his apprentice now withdrew; but before they left the cell, Jack was careful to conceal the file where he had concealed the nail—that is to say, in the soft mortar between the stones with which the floor of his dungeon was paved.

He pushed it in in a slanting direction, and in so clever a manner as to defy detection.

It was well he took this precaution, for just after Sir James and his apprentice had quitted the cell, Jonathan Wild and the Governor entered.

The former looked sharply and suspiciously about him as he said:

"I'll be d—d if I like this portrait-painting job, and I am heartily glad it's over!"

"So am I."

"We will search the cell."

"I do not suspect Sir James," said the Governor. "He is an upright, honourable man, and he gave me his solemn word of honour that he would not supply the prisoner with anything."

"Bah!"

"You would not take his word?"

"No, nor his oath!"

As he spoke, Jonathan advanced towards Jack Sheppard, and rapidly examined him from head to foot.

He searched in all his pockets and felt all his garments.

Of course, he found nothing.

Then he looked closely all about the stone bench and under it, and everywhere, but the thought that they were concealed in the mortar between the stones never occurred to him, nor was it likely to do so, for he would have thought naturally enough that the mortar was hard and impracticable for such a purpose.

With what anxiety Jack Sheppard awaited the result of this close search the reader may perchance imagine.

He trembled once or twice when Jonathan actually passed his hand over the spot where his treasures were concealed.

Should he be bereft of them, it would be good-bye to all hopes of escape.

But they remained undiscovered.

Jonathan at length rose to his feet, satisfied that the prisoner was not only unpossessed of any instrument, but also that his fetters had not been tampered with in the least.

In a false state of security, then, he left the cell in company with his associate.

Jack never moved for several minutes after they had gone, for he thought they might be quite cunning enough to return abruptly, and look in again.

But this apprehension was a groundless one, and after waiting long enough to have no fears of an intrusion, Jack rubbed his hands together briskly, and exhibited other symptoms of delight and satisfaction.

CHAPTER CCCLXVII.

FIGG, THE PRIZE-FIGHTER, PAYS A VISIT TO JACK IN HIS CELL, AND GIVES HIM THE PARTICULARS OF A SINGULAR WAGER.

NEVER was any poor human being so sorely tempted as Jack Sheppard was.

His joy quickly subsided, and being now left alone, he fixed his eyes on the spot where his treasures were deposited, and strove to content himself by looking at them merely.

He made up his mind that, in order to guard against any danger of discovery, he would not disturb the file until he had occasion to use it; but he soon found that to keep his determination required all the strength of his mind.

His fingers itched for it; and every now and then he would stoop down, and then, suddenly recollecting himself, would start up.

He fancied that if he could only hold the precious file in his hand—if he could only turn it over and over and examine it—if he could only feel its sharp teeth against the brawn of his thumb—he should be content; or, at least, more content than he could be by simply eyeing, not it, but the mortar beneath which it was buried.

But he strove to overcome this inclination, for he thought, and truly, that if he gave way thus far he would not be content until he had made a trial of its power and sharpness on his fetters.

This would have never done, for detection would have been the result; so wisely he exercised all the forbearance he could, and combated against the inclination as much as possible.

He succeeded, and the file remained in the mortar between the stones undisturbed.

In spite of all, Jack Sheppard's heart was light.

When he leaned back on the stone bench and glanced around the cell, it was in a contemptuous manner, as though he despised the power of those strong stone walls to keep him there a prisoner.

And yet how slight and insignificant appeared the means which he possessed with which to release himself.

A file and a nail!

Those were all.

Two small, insignificant pieces of iron.

And yet he did not doubt that, skilfully used, they would enable him to pierce through the iron doors and massive walls.

He relied upon his own cleverness to succeed, including the negligence of his enemies.

But he would have to wait, and he thought incessantly upon the time when he should commence his operations.

It was a long time before he could decide upon the hour which would be best for him to commence.

He made up his mind finally that, if no unforeseen circumstance occurred, Friday night should be the time.

During the day, the men would be much engaged in attending at the court, and he would be able to make considerable progress in filing through his fetters before night came.

There was the risk that what he had done would be discovered when he was examined the last thing at night; but he believed he should be able to conceal the places where he had been at work by filling them up with that which, with great pains and patience, he collected off the floor of the dungeon.

It was black and sticky, and being rubbed into the places where the file had been, would not only conceal the brightness, but fill it up; while, from the colour of this mud being similar in tint to the iron of which his fetters were composed, he doubted not that he should be able to pass an examination.

Had he known what was destined to take place on the Friday upon which he so calculated, he would have spared himself the trouble.

The greater part of the short winter's day had been taken up by Sir James Thornhill, and the night rapidly came on.

This was Tuesday, and Jack comforted himself with the assurance that in two days afterwards he should be free.

He wondered many times what had become of Blueskin. He began to think it strange that he had not heard or seen anything of him.

He quite thought that his old comrade would have opened up some means of communication, but he was disappointed.

He could only account for it by supposing that Blueskin was fully occupied in looking after his own safety.

That he, too, was an inmate of the huge prison never once occurred to him.

If he had known, the whole course of his proceedings would have been altered.

At any risk he would have made his way first to his comrade's cell, and then have escaped in company with his old friend.

But of Blueskin's presence in Newgate, Jack was studiously kept ignorant, and nothing but some accident would make him acquainted with it.

As usual, the thief-taker and the Governor paid him a last visit, but nothing particular took place; and when he judged they had been gone long enough, Jack took the nail and unlocked his fetters.

This was a wonderful relief to him, and indeed we may boldly affirm that, had he not succeeded in this, he would have failed in the remainder.

The mere fact of his having his limbs cramped up in one position for such a length of time would have so crippled him that he would never have been able to stir.

We must not forget either to take into calculation the effects which the exercise he daily took produced upon his constitution.

Every morning before he resumed his fetters he circulated his blood and exercised his limbs by moving round and round and up and down his cell until perspiration streamed from every pore.

Then he had—thanks to the munificence of his curious visitors—lived on the best of everything, so that he was in first-rate bodily condition, and equal to the execution of almost any feat, no matter how daring.

On the Wednesday morning the sessions began, and Jack was careful to observe what difference this made in the closeness of the attentions of the gaolers.

To his dismay, he discovered that they were more rigid than ever.

This filled him with apprehension for some time, until the thought struck him that there was a simple reason for it.

His keepers would no doubt think that he would try to take some advantage of this particular time.

If so, all Jack had to do was to strive to throw them off their guard, and the way in which he behaved was eminently calculated to succeed in doing this.

Every time he was visited he was found sitting dejectedly upon the stone bench, with his arms folded.

Jack perceived the effects of this on the succeeding day.

He was not visited near so frequently, and during the day the intervals between each visit grew longer and longer.

Over this he exulted greatly, but he allowed no sign of it to be perceptible.

This encouraged him, too, to wait with patience, and not commence his operations until the morrow, as he had at first determined.

On Thursday, Jack had several visitors, and among them was the celebrated prize-fighter, Mr. Figg.

He was curious to a degree to see Jack; and, not without some trouble, succeeded in getting an order to admit him.

He was closely searched, for it was fancied that such a one would be likely to convey the prisoner something.

But though the whole of his clothing was rigidly examined, nothing was found.

He was then allowed to enter the cell.

The first glimpse he caught of Jack Sheppard—whose person was totally unknown to him—elicited his utmost admiration.

Stopping short a few paces from the door, he exclaimed:

"Impossible! Here is some mistake. This stripling, with no more strength in his whole body than many have in their hands, cannot possibly have twice effected an escape from Newgate!"

"It's all right!" said the turnkey, as he closed the door.

For some time Figg stood still with amazement, gazing upon Jack.

He had doubtless expected to behold some second Hercules, and not a slim-looking youth as Jack appeared.

In comparison to him, the prize-fighter looked a giant.

Recovering from his astonishment, he came forward and shook Jack by the hand.

But Sheppard noticed that Figg held out his left hand, while he kept his right rather oddly closed.

Jack knew the prize-fighter by sight, having seen him many times, and therefore he responded freely enough to his friendly greeting.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Jack," said Figg, as he worked his right hand about in a curious manner—"I am very glad to see you, though it is in such a place."

"I have not many comforts," replied Jack; "but still I might be worse off."

"Very true!" said Figg, as he made a strange choking sound in his throat—"you might be—"

"Oh, don't mention it!"

"I won't, if you don't like it; but, Jack?"

"What?"

"I daresay you wonder what has brought me here to see you?"

"The same motive that has brought others, I suppose?"

"Do you mean mere curiosity?"

"Yes."

"There you are out, Jack; and you would wonder more if you knew what trouble it has cost me—to say nothing of expense—to get an order to come and see you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes—and there was the unpleasantness of being overhauled by a couple of d—d turnkeys!"

"You were searched, then?"

"Yes, I was searched," replied the prize-fighter, with a grin. "But, Jack, my boy, I won't keep you any longer in suspense—I will tell you what has really brought me here."

"I am curious to hear it."

"Well, come a little closer, for I would not be overheard for the world!"

The prize-fighter then said, in a whisper:

"Jack, I have made a bet about you."

"A bet about me?"

"Yes, and a heavy one too, I can tell you!"

"In what manner?"

"That I will tell you in a moment. Hush! Let me speak softly! The other night I was in company with some friends, and the conversation turned upon you, Jack, and your dexterous exploits."

"I suppose I am the common talk of all London?"

"You are, and no mistake!"

"I thought so."

"Never mind that, Jack! You ought to feel proud. However, that's neither here nor there. We were talking about what you had done, and wondering what tools you had for your purpose. Some went so far as to say you had none at all."

"Well?"

"I did not believe that; but I laid a wager of twenty guineas that if a file were given you, in twenty-four hours afterwards you would be free."

"Twenty-four hours after the file was given me?"

"Yes."

"And when should I have the file?"

"Now; here it is. Look!"

Figg opened his right hand, which he had hitherto kept so mysteriously closed, and showed that he had the article he spoke of cunningly concealed in it.

Jack shook his head when he saw it.

"Why do you shake your head, Jack?"

"I am sorry you have laid the wager."

"Why? Do you mean to say that if you have a file given you you cannot escape?"

"Well, not exactly that."

"What is it, then?"

"You will lose your wager if you have stipulated that I shall be free twenty-four hours after I receive it."

"Why? Is the time too short?"

"No, the time is long enough."

"What on earth do you mean, then?"

Jack hesitated.

But presently he said:

"Well, I will trust you. I have already arranged to escape to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes, Friday night. So you see that if you give me the file now you will lose your wager. If you give it to me to-morrow you will win it."

"Are you sure, Jack?"

"Certain!"

"Then I can get over the difficulty—I can make it all right. Here, take the file."

"Very good, sir—I am obliged to you for it. It will be useful, doubtless; but I should have escaped without it."

"You are a wonderful fellow, Jack!"

"You will keep what I have told you a secret?"

"Oh, depend upon it! If you do not succeed in your attempt, I shall lose twenty guineas by it."

"Oh—ah, of course! It is to your advantage to keep it a secret."

"Just so. And now, Jack, I will be off. Whatever you do, take care of the file, and be sure you do not fail to escape the time you mention."

"On Saturday morning I shall be as free as you."

"Well, if you are, you deserve to be let alone. You are in the very heart of Newgate, you are loaded with chains twice your own weight, and you are watched closely by a score of people; and all I say is, if you can get out without any more aid than I have just given you, you will deserve to retain your liberty for your cleverness."

CHAPTER CCCLXVIII.

JACK SHEPPARD IS PUZZLED AND PERPLEXED BY WILD'S ABSENCE, BUT NEVERTHELESS SETS TO WORK IN GOOD EARNEST TO MAKE HIS ESCAPE.

"I wish I could persuade those who have power in these matters to think the same as you do," said Jack, with a sigh.

"Well, I really think you will deserve your liberty for your cleverness. How you are going to manage it, I don't know!"

"That I must keep to myself."

"Well, Jack, I don't want to pry into your secrets. Good-bye, my boy! You may depend upon it I shall be mum."

"Pray do! If the turnkeys were to have the least suspicions of what I intend, you would lose your wager."

"All right! I'll keep dark, never fear!"

"I can trust you."

Some more words passed between them, and then, with a cordial shake of the hand, they separated.

As soon as he had gone, Jack hastened to bury the second file close to the other one.

When he had done, he looked up, and murmured:

"Surely Fortune smiles upon me! I shall make my escape this time despite my foes. This second file makes all secure, for if the first fails me, I can turn to that. Yes, yes, I shall be free!"

Jack continually repeated the words, "I shall be free!" and it seemed as though the mere act of his doing so gave him additional confidence.

He had now little or no fear that he should fail in his great design.

As he had expected at first, he was troubled less and less with the turnkeys, who were occupied at the court, from which place indeed they could not be spared.

Then on Friday, that being the last and busiest day, he counted upon being more free from them still.

Jack's heart was now light enough, and the time passed quickly by.

When night came, he undid his fetters as usual, but while he did so he made the reflection that the next time he should tell them off for good.

As might be expected, the excited state of his mind prevented him from sleeping soundly.

He awoke at frequent intervals, fancying that something dreadful had taken place.

He resolutely composed himself to sleep again each time that he awoke, for he felt the importance of resting himself thoroughly, so as to be in a position to endure the fatigues of the day and night ensuing.

Nevertheless, he was glad when morning came, and having gone through his accustomed exercise, he sat down as usual.

At breakfast-time, the turnkey appeared with a tempting meal, which Jack Sheppard ate with all the greater relish because he believed that it was the last breakfast he would partake of in Newgate.

When the remnants had been taken away, he believed he should be left for some time unmolested, and so he resolved to begin to use his file at once upon those portions of his fetters which were riveted upon him, and which, of course, could not be removed without filing through them.

Jack set to work with right good will.

Never did he feel more satisfied with an occupation than he did with this.

The file which he had taken from Hogarth's pocket was one of first-rate quality, and seemed excellently well adapted for the use to which it was now put.

In making the fetters no care was taken that the iron selected should be of the hardest quality.

So long as it was heavy, that was enough.

Jack soon found that the iron was of a very soft character, and the file ate into it with great rapidity.

He was careful not to confine his operations to one place, but having filed through one to a certain distance, he would pause and carefully fill up the place with the soft black mud which he had collected for this purpose.

He was glad to find that this concealed his work in a most admirable manner, and only a close examination would have detected it.

But though the iron was soft, the file sharp, and Jack worked with right good will, he nevertheless found that filing through a thick piece of iron was a very tedious process.

Moreover, every now and then he had to pause and listen, lest anyone should come upon him unawares, and more than once had he to hide his file, so sure did he feel that some one was approaching.

The truth was that Jack was in momentary expectation of seeing Jonathan Wild, who had not made his appearance since the preceding night, and he had never gone so long without paying a visit before.

At dinner-time he was obliged to pause, and indeed he was right glad to do so, for his fingers ached with the constant use he had made of them.

After dinner, however, having rested himself somewhat, he resumed his labour.

Still, Jonathan did not come, and this puzzled and disconcerted Jack extremely.

He would ten times rather have had him prying about, but this absence filled him with apprehension.

He was afraid some deep motive lurked behind it, but he was at a loss to think what.

As the day advanced his uneasiness increased to such an extent that he was unable to continue his work.

At each sound he started and trembled, and finally he was compelled to desist altogether.

In a state of mind perfectly indescribable, he leaned back against the wall and waited for Wild to come.

After he had been he felt he should be all right, but not until he had.

Carefully had Jack filled up the gaps in the iron which the file had made, and now that it was growing dark he defied detection.

Still Wild did not come.

Supper was brought as usual, and Jack partook of it heartily.

He longed to ask the turnkey the reason of Jonathan's non-appearance, but dreaded to do so lest suspicion should be aroused.

He thought there was a look of unusual importance in the man's face, as though something very extraordinary had taken place; but Jack did not dare trust himself to speak.

He was glad when the man took his departure, for he found it difficult to exercise control over himself.

After supper, Jack sat quite still.

Later and later it became, but still no one came.

What could be the meaning of it?

A thought now occurred to Jack that chilled his very blood.

His heart stood still, and cold drops of perspiration broke out upon him.

Could Jonathan Wild, by some means or other, have obtained a knowledge of what he was about to do that night?

Had he, with that devilish cunning which he possessed and was so fond of exercising—had he kept away in order to let him go to work uninterruptedly, that his triumph should be greater?

What if, when he had, with incredible labour and fatigue, effected his escape, he should fall into the hands of the thief-taker, when he imagined he was on the very threshold of freedom?

This was a terrible thought for Jack to have, and was one that disconcerted him greatly.

Oh, how ardently he wished that Jonathan Wild would come!

Jack never thought that a time would come when he should so much desire the presence of his arch-enemy.

But it did come.

Jack's agitation increased as the time flew by.

It was so sickening to begin to work under the impression that all the toil would have no other effect than to place him more firmly in Wild's power than he had ever been before.

Jack could imagine his sensations when after, with incredible toil, he had gained the street he should find Jonathan and his myrmidons waiting for him.

He knew Wild was quite capable of such a trick.

He would exult and delight in it.

It would give him the greatest possible satisfaction.

If he knew Jack was escaping, he would watch him at every step, chuckle over his fruitless labour, and then pounce upon him at the moment when the prisoner began to congratulate himself on his freedom.

To such a pitch of excitement did Jack at last work himself that he felt, if he had much longer to wait, he should go mad.

Suddenly a sound came, and he listened to it with the utmost joy.

"He comes—he comes!" he said; "the villain comes, and all will yet be well!"

Some one was indeed approaching his cell, and in a moment afterwards the door was flung open.

Eagerly Jack gazed at those who entered.

But he was disappointed.

Mr. Noakes and a turnkey alone came.

Where, then, was Jonathan?

Jack would have given anything to have had a correct answer to that question.

But he knew better than to ask it.

The Governor having satisfied himself by a glance that all was well, left the cell again to retire to rest, for he was tired out by all that had happened on that eventful day.

When he had departed, Jack clasped his head with his hands, as he said:

"What am I to think of all this? What shall I do? What can be the meaning of Jonathan thus suddenly discontinuing his visits? I have not seen him since last night. Twenty-four hours have never elapsed before during my imprisonment without my seeing him! What can it mean?"

It was in vain Jack tortured himself to find an answer to the question.

He was finally compelled to give it up in despair.

"It is but a thought," he said. "I am probably alarming myself groundlessly. At any rate, the thought, powerful as it is, shall not prevent me from making at least an effort to escape; and now I think of it, I must be wrong. I have made a mistake throughout! If Jonathan wished to lull me into a sense of false security, he would not have done anything calculated to rouse my suspicions. He would have come as usual, so that I should have fallen all the more blindly into the snare. I ought to have thought of this before, and not have alarmed myself in the way I have done!"

Thus fluctuating between hope and fear, as he was swayed by them alternately, did Jack Sheppard spend some miserable hours.

But at length he shook off these thoughts, and, satisfied that all within the prison had now retired to rest, he began in good earnest to set about his task.

Taking the nail from its hiding-place, he first of all undid the padlock, and freed himself in this manner of as many of his fetters as he could.

This done, he placed the nail carefully in his pocket,

for he could not tell how soon he might require its services.

He now set to work with his file, and soon got rid of more, but he found time speeding rapidly, and so he determined to go no further with these at present.

He had freed his arms and his waist, and all that remained were the iron rings or basils which were riveted round his ankles.

These were of great thickness, and would require a long time to file through, so he determined to put up with the inconvenience of wearing them.

To these basils a piece of straight iron, about a foot long, was attached, and to prevent this jingling or dragging at his heels he placed it upright against his leg, and tied it there with his garters.

He had now to get out of his cell.

It seemed as though he had done a great deal already, and yet how insignificant it seemed when placed in comparison with what he had to accomplish.

His body was free, it is true, from the encumbrances which it had formerly worn, but that now seemed nothing.

Resolutely enough, however, Jack made his way to the door of the cell, resolved to commence an attack upon it.

He tried it first, and felt it all over.

It was lined with sheet-iron, which was fastened on to the wood with a thousand rivets, while over the lock a piece of drill-proof steel had been fixed.

Jack at once gave up all ideas of passing through that door.

It was impregnable, and would be proof against all that he could bring to bear upon it.

So he gave it up, but he would not have done so so readily had he not thought of another means by which his dungeon could be left.

Finding, then, that the door would resist all his efforts, he determined to adopt this second resource, though, for many reasons, he would have preferred to have worked his way through the door had it seemed at all possible that he would succeed in accomplishing such a feat.

CHAPTER CCCLIX.

CONTINUES TO RELATE JACK SHEPPARD'S PROCEEDINGS IN THE CELL.

JACK SHEPPARD did not allow himself to be in the least cast down by this failure.

With as much vigour and determination as ever he continued his work, for he felt that his life wholly and solely depended upon the exertions he made that night.

On a previous occasion, Jack had succeeded in making an escape from a cell by excavating under the door.

The operation was a tedious one, but still it seemed to offer every prospect of success, and so he resolved to attempt it.

He was the more inclined to do this because he had noticed how soft the mortar was between the stones.

They would no doubt be easily raised, and if the ground under them was no harder than the mortar, there would be very little trouble in digging it out, although he had no suitable tools.

With one of the files, Jack now swept away the mortar round all four sides of one of the stones, and having done this much, he proceeded to raise it.

This he accomplished by using a portion of his fetters as a lever, and having raised it sufficiently at one side to place his fingers under it, he exerted all his strength to lift it up.

He found this taxed his strength to the utmost, but he succeeded.

He rested the flagstone up against the wall.

A large square black space was now made visible, and Jack set to work to dig it up.

The soil was very soft, and he scooped it out with his hands with very little trouble.

He worked rapidly, and in a short time had cleared away the soil from the frame on which the door was hung.

Suddenly, however, as he was loosening the earth with a piece of his fetters, he felt the end strike against some metallic substance.

The sound dismayed him.

Hastily and anxiously he removed the soil, bring

anxious to ascertain the precise nature of the obstruction.

His heart failed him now, for he had a presentiment that he would have to suffer a second disappointment.

Again and again as he tried to loosen the earth underneath the door did his tool strike against some metallic substance.

What could it be?

At length, by the exercise of incredible labour, Jack had cleared away a large quantity of soil; and then he proceeded to ascertain, if he could, what it was that barred his progress.

Passing his hand over it, he became conscious at the first touch that it was iron.

He uttered a groan.

A more rapid and searching examination made all clear to him.

"I see it all now!" he cried, as he started in frenzy to his feet—"I see it all now! They have taken a hint from the way in which I formerly effected my escape. Fool—fool that I am! I ought to have known that they would do so! They have fixed a huge sheet of iron under the door, which I cannot possibly pierce through or burrow under!"

This was precisely the state of the case.

When it became known how Jack had formerly made his escape, steps were taken which would, it was believed, effectually prevent a repetition of it.

Underneath the cell doors a large piece of sheet iron of considerable thickness was placed, in a position perpendicular to the door itself.

This iron wall nothing would penetrate, and such was its dimensions that it would have taken hours to have either burrowed under it or round either side.

This was the case with the newer cells, but the one in which Jack was confined was of great antiquity, and this precaution had already been adopted with respect to it.

Jack was in despair.

He threw himself down upon the damp floor of the dungeon, and groaned aloud.

The second resource, upon which he had so confidently reckoned, had failed him.

What was to be done now?

How was he to escape from that dreadful cell?

Would it baffle all his efforts?

It would seem so.

At present, all he had done was to waste time, and uselessly exhaust his energies.

The only consolation he had derived from his labours was the conviction that it was impossible to escape.

Jack writhed upon the ground like some wounded snake.

He could imagine the jeers and taunts of Jonathan Wild and the Governor, when they came in in the morning and saw how he had been employed.

This thought maddened him more than all the rest.

He took hold of his hair, and tore it off by handfuls.

By degrees, however, he grew calmer.

Then he rose to his feet.

"This is folly," he said; "I will not despair—I have determined to escape, and I will do it, no matter how many difficulties stand in my path. I will do it—I will be free!"

Jack looked around him as well as the darkness would permit him.

But he could see nothing that would give him hope.

Just instinctively he turned towards the door, and a groan which he could not repress came from his lips.

How that door had disappointed him!

He had scoffed at its strength and security, but now he was abased and humbled.

He could see no means at present of effecting his release if he could not overcome this door.

The only other openings in the cell were the chimney and the window.

As for the latter, it was a mere hole in the stone-work, and strongly defended by iron bars.

If he removed these—and it would require some hours to do so—the aperture they protected was so small that he could not have even squeezed his slender anatomy through it.

Then the chimney.

That was so small that he feared it would be folly to attempt to try to ascend it.

At last, however, as he could see nothing else better, he resolved to try.

He had his choice of making the effort, or lying down and abandoning all hope of escape entirely.

While there was the ghost of a chance, Jack was not likely to do this.

But he went to the chimney with a heavy heart.

He had looked at it many times, and was all but confident he could not ascend.

But he made the attempt.

He did succeed in getting his head up, but that was all.

The aperture was so small that it was impossible for his body to pass through it.

He would have stood just as good a chance if he had tried to crawl through a keyhole.

Jack drew back with a groan.

All hope was over now.

He must remain just where he was, to be found in the morning, and laughed at for his impotent attempts to escape.

Jack dreaded this ridicule more than anything else, and it proved a powerful incentive to exertion.

But it could not make him perform impossibilities.

It seemed as though that cell was strong enough to laugh all his efforts to scorn.

Jack was in despair.

He flung himself down upon the ground again, and beat his head with such violence against the hard stones as threatened to break his skull.

As before, however, the paroxysm passed away.

But how time was consumed!

A long time had elapsed since he had commenced his operations, and now, if he succeeded in leaving the cell, he did not stand half so good a chance of ultimately getting off, for he would have to work his way from the centre of the prison into the open air.

Who could contemplate such obstacles as lay before him, and not stand back agast?

Probably none save Jack Sheppard.

His fertile brain never allowed him to sink long under a difficulty, and the present occasion proved it.

Ere long another thought occurred to him, and the next moment so pleased did he feel with it that he clapped his hands and cried out with pleasure.

"That will do it!" he said—"that will do it! Fool that I was not to think of such a simple thing before! That is what I ought to have done first, and then by this time I should doubtless have been outside Newgate. But better late than never—I will try now!"

The project which Jack had now formed did not appear to be at all of a character to inspire much hope.

Finding the entrance to the chimney so small, he had given it up, but now he recollected the shape of it.

It swelled gradually from the bottom to the top, being shaped almost like the segment of a huge funnel.

Jack's idea now was to form a breach in the wall of the chimney, as high up from the floor as he could reach.

He should then be able to ascend the chimney, and make his way into the chamber overhead.

Out of this chamber he would probably have little difficulty in making his way.

What a hopeless, endless task this seemed!

But Jack thought only lightly of it.

He saw, indeed, the road to freedom lying open before him.

Taking up the files again, which had already done him such good service, he proceeded to pick away the mortar from round a stone as high up in the wall as he could reach.

For this purpose the sharp file was admirably adapted, but suddenly, through bearing too heavily upon it, he broke it.

He threw it down with an impatient gesture, for now that it was broken the pieces were so very small as to be wholly unserviceable.

He had another file, however, and this now proved a very fortunate circumstance.

With greater care he used this second file, for if he broke it the consequences would be fatal.

Having at length picked away all the mortar, he put the file into his pocket, and with the heaviest portion of his fetters tried to knock the stone into the chimney.

It gave way before his efforts.

He renewed the vigour of his labour, and presently the



JACK SHEPPARD ESCAPING FROM NEWGATE.

stone sank into the chimney and fell rattling down into the fireplace.

"Hurrah!" cried Jack, as he wiped the streaming perspiration from his forehead with the sleeve of his coat. "Hurrah! This is success indeed!"

He paused, for his lips were parched, and burning with the mortar he had dislodged.

Nevertheless, he resumed his toil with greater ardour than before, for now he had encouragement to proceed.

One stone having been removed, no longer made it necessary to use the file.

Picking up the stone itself, he held it in both hands, and used it as a hammer to break down the rest.

By adopting this measure, he enlarged the breach with very great rapidity.

Suddenly he came to a fresh obstacle.

This was a bar of iron about an inch square, which had been placed across the chimney with superfluous caution, so as to do away with all possibility of a prisoner making his escape.

No. 76.—BLUESKIN.

"I will have that bar," said Jack, as soon as he perceived it. "It will make an excellent crow. I will get it out, and then I shall be able to make the walls of Newgate crumble down before me."

Jack set to work to clear away all that portion of the masonry which interfered with his seeing the bar, and having done so, he found that it was about two feet and a half in length.

Could he but obtain possession of it, it would indeed form a serviceable and formidable weapon, and Jack determined not to be balked of having it.

But he found that it was very firmly bedded into the stones with a species of mortar that seemed to be of a harder quality than the rest.

To remove this, Jack was compelled to resort to his file.

He used it with great care so as to prevent a breakage, and after some time had the satisfaction of finding one end was free.

He then set about the other, but almost at the first stroke the file broke.

A more vexatious occurrence than this could scarcely be imagined.

Jack's passion was terrible; and it was while dominated with it that he seized the piece of iron with both hands, and, with a sudden jerk, released the other end.

Having done this, reconciled him in some measure to the breakage of the file.

He now held in his hands a bar of iron two feet and a half in length and an inch square.

With such a weapon how much might be accomplished! Feeling, however, that there was no time to lose, Jack set about him with right good will.

At every blow he struck the wall of the chimney the stones fell clattering down, and in a few moments he had made a hole large enough to crawl through.

Placing the bar which had served him so well in a convenient position he mounted, and without much trouble scrambled through the breach.

Then taking the bar in his hand he held it up at the full length of his arm in order to ascertain whether there was any other obstruction above him.

CHAPTER CCCLXX.

RELATES HOW JACK SHEPPARD GOT OUT OF HIS DUNGEON INTO THE RED-ROOM, AND HOW FROM THENCE HE MADE HIS WAY INTO THE CHAPEL.

HE waved the bar about, and, as he fully expected, it struck against the bottom of the grate in the room above.

A light would now have been of the utmost service to him, but it was folly to think about such a thing, so very wisely he banished the thought.

Stimulated by the success he had already had, Jack set about this fresh task with additional ardour.

He would have to make a breach in the floor of the room above, and then, when he had drawn himself up into this apartment, it would be time enough for him to think what further steps he should take.

It required a dauntless courage to make, or rather attempt, an escape from Newgate.

Even when the next chamber was reached, one would be a long way from being free.

But Jack was not cast down.

One reason for this was, he never allowed himself to be daunted with contemplating at one time all that he had to do.

He shut his eyes to all difficulties except the one before him.

When he had surmounted that, then was the time to look at the next.

This was the secret of his success.

He had first looked at his fetters, and, as we have seen, he freed himself from them.

Then he turned to making his way out of the cell, and he seemed likely to do that.

Until he had worked his way out of it he would not look the next obstacle in the face.

It was a wise proceeding.

The only fear was, that as he found obstacle after obstacle springing up with obstinate pertinacity he would grow tired of their perpetual recurrence.

We shall see.

As though he cared very little whether he was heard or not, Jack Sheppard worked away with his iron bar at the floor above with right good will.

Down came the bricks and fragments of stone and mortar in a perfect shower.

Jack redoubled his efforts.

Suddenly, to his great joy, the iron bar ceased to encounter any obstruction.

He could wave it about freely overhead.

The way to the upper chamber was open to him.

He resolved to climb up, but to do so with the iron bar would be difficult.

Still he could not think of leaving so valuable an implement behind him.

He could not tell what further need he might have of its services.

It might prove to be of greater use to him than it had been hitherto.

After wondering for a long time how he should manage this, he fancied he should be able to throw it up into the room above and then ascend himself afterwards.

No sooner did this thought occur to him than he set about putting it into execution.

The first time he failed.

He threw the bar up, but it did not remain.

It came clattering down again, and he narrowly escaped receiving a severe blow from it.

He caught it in his hand and threw it up again.

This time it remained, and he now set to work to follow it.

This was, in comparison with his former achievement, the easiest thing imaginable.

In less than a moment he climbed the chimney and squeezed his body through the hole he had made.

Upon gaining his feet the first thing he did was to feel about for his iron bar.

His hand soon encountered it.

Taking it firmly in his grasp, and holding it out horizontally before him, he walked boldly across the room, though he was careful not to stumble against anything.

There was one grated window in this apartment, and through this a few rays of nightlight came.

This was all Jack had to aid him.

He took care to walk across the room in the direction that would take him over the door of his dungeon below.

He argued, and plausibly enough, that the one door would be situated immediately over the other.

Ere he had gone many paces the extreme end of the bar struck against something.

He paused at once, and felt about him with his hands.

By the feel he could tell that he was touching the stone wall of the chamber.

He passed his hand over it, and presently felt the door.

To his joy he found it was not lined with iron as the one was that led out of his dungeon, and this inspired him with the hope that he should be able to make his way through it.

The room in which he now stood was known among the officials of Newgate as the Red-room.

A long time had elapsed since the door had been opened.

The last prisoner it contained was some nobleman who had been concerned in the rebellion of 1715.

They were all staunch adherents to the Stuart faction, and were proved guilty of treason to their lawful Sovereign.

The sentence passed upon them was death by the hand of the executioner.

In consequence of their rank, however, they were spared the ignominy of the hangman's rope.

They were all beheaded, and some say that it was from this circumstance that the dungeon in which they had been confined received the name of the Red-room.

This may or may not be true, but it is an undoubted fact that after their death the door was locked and no person had from that time entered the chamber until Jack Sheppard made a forcible entry into it in the manner we have just recorded.

Nearly seventy years had elapsed from this period.

We have digressed so far in order to show how it was that this door was not so strongly secured as most others in the prison were.

In his examinations Jack soon found that the door was fastened by a lock only.

He went to work, therefore, with great spirit, and in less than ten minutes had it open.

He passed through at once, and stood in the corridor without.

Jack had already planned a certain route to take in getting out of the prison, and the chapel was comprehended in it.

Towards this then he resolved to proceed without delay.

But he had to pause a moment or two to consider which was the direction he ought to take.

He had particularly noticed the route from the door of his dungeon to the chapel, and after a little reflection he turned to the right along the corridor.

He continued along it for several yards until his further progress was stayed by another door.

Here then was another obstruction.

With a feeling of great confidence about his heart, however, Jack proceeded to examine it.

In the course of this examination his confidence abated. His heart failed him.

He began to fear that the door would prove the most serious obstacle he had at present met with.

It was a perfect miracle of strength, and on the side upon which Jack stood no fastening could be found, with the exception of the lock.

Upon this, however, Jack made a resolute attack with his iron bar; and having succeeded at length in inserting the point of this between the box of the lock and the door-post, he by a sudden exertion of strength wrenched it off.

Having done this, he tried the door; but, to his mortification, found that, to all appearance, it was as strong as before.

He could not move it in the least.

Having made this discovery, he tried to call to mind what fastenings were on the other side of the door.

Unless he was mistaken, a heavy iron bar crossed it in a horizontal direction.

This iron bar must be removed.

But how?

The door itself was so strong as to laugh to scorn all attempts that he might make upon it.

Then the door-post was composed of stone, and evidently of great thickness.

A cold perspiration broke out upon him.

But he soon rallied.

He determined, after having accomplished so much as he had, after making such incredible exertions, he would not be baffled by a door.

Animated by this spirit he set to work upon the door-post.

He could see no other means of achieving his purpose than by chipping away the stone with his iron bar.

This would not only be a tedious and difficult operation, but a noisy one.

From noise he had everything to fear.

Up to the present moment he had caused no alarm.

All within the prison seemed as silent as death itself.

The gaolers and the Governor, tired out with their extra duty in the court during the preceding days, slept even sounder than usual.

Fortune had favoured him exceedingly, but he feared that upon making a breach in the stone wall large enough to remove the bar, he should create an alarm.

He might be heard by the debtors, whose quarters in the prison were not far distant from this; for at the period of which we write, Newgate was a prison for debtors as well as felons, and continued to be so for many years afterwards.

Notwithstanding these apprehensions, however, Jack stuck bravely to his work; but he was careful not to make any more noise than he could help.

He delivered his strokes with the iron bar with great rapidity, and at each stroke a piece of stone was chipped off.

He could wish for no better encouragement in his labours than this, and he continued to work without stopping, except when he paused to listen now and then to ascertain whether there were any signs of an alarm having been given.

All continuing silent as before, however, he went on with his work.

In a short time he succeeded in making a breach completely through the wall, and so well had he calculated the distance from the floor at which the bar was placed, that he was able to lift it from its setting.

He was compelled to let it fall, however, and it reached the stone floor of the corridor with such a terrible clang that made his heart go as cold as stone.

He stood for a moment in a state of the utmost suspense, but reassured by the silence which still endured, he ventured to push the door open.

It yielded easily to his touch.

He passed through it in a moment.

He was now able to proceed without further interruption to the chapel.

He knew well enough, from the careful observations he had taken, that there was no other door to hinder him, save the one which led into the chapel.

Here he soon arrived.

The peculiar appearance of this door had not escaped his notice.

The lower part was of wood, studded with rivets, and was securely fastened.

The upper portion, however, consisted of iron spikes, so that in the daytime it was quite possible for anyone to stand outside the door and look into the chapel between these spikes, which were upwards of a foot in length.

Jack had previously made up his mind as to how he should deal with this door.

He determined not to attempt to force the lock or bolts, but to break off one of the spikes, and squeeze himself through the space thus left.

It was an easy way of overcoming a very serious difficulty.

Taking up his iron bar, he held it lengthwise, and with it struck the spike near the bottom part.

At the third stroke he broke it off.

The space now left was not very great, but still Jack thought it was large enough to squeeze his slender body through.

In the first place, he pushed the iron bar through, and let it drop on to the floor of the chapel.

Then seizing hold of the top edges of the door, he raised himself up.

The aperture proved very narrow, and he bruised himself sadly in attempting to force his way through it.

When he had forced his shoulders through, the difficulty was not so great, and after repeated struggles he reached the floor of the chapel.

Having done this, he rested a moment to recover his strength, for he was terribly exhausted by the efforts he had made.

He then felt about for the iron bar, which he was resolved not to part with.

In feeling for this his hand encountered the iron spike which he had broken off.

This he immediately consigned to his pocket, for there was just a chance that he should be able to avail himself of it in some way.

The iron bar was close by; and once more taking up this implement, without which he could certainly never have done what he had, he proceeded to cross the chapel.

This place was in profound darkness, and great care was therefore requisite to avoid coming into contact with the numerous objects it contained.

As before, he held the bar out before him in a horizontal position, so as to be aware, at the earliest moment, when he was near to anything.

By adopting this very simple measure, he saved himself several severe blows, which otherwise he would have inevitably sustained.

Although the only opportunities Jack had of observing the interior arrangements of the chapel were while he was being led to his pew and taken from it, yet he had made such good use of his eyes that he imprinted the whole of it upon his memory.

This knowledge was now of the utmost value to him, and without making the least mistake, or deviating from one direction, he crossed the floor of the edifice.

CHAPTER CCLXXI.

JACK SHEPPARD SUCCEEDS IN GETTING ON TO THE ROOF OF NEWGATE.

JACK SHEPPARD was well aware that from one side of the chapel a door opened which led into a passage or entry, communicating with the leads, as the roof of the prison was called in consequence of its being covered with this metal.

It was the roof which he desired to gain, for he fancied that once here he would have little trouble in descending to the street below.

Having reached, at length, the wall of the chapel, somewhere near the spot where this door was situated, Jack began to feel about him with his hands.

Never until this moment was he so conscious of the utility of his eyes.

The least light would now have saved him an infinite deal of time.

He was, however, compelled to be patient.

At last his hands encountered the door, and he immediately set to work to ascertain what kind of fastenings were upon it.

They were all on the side upon which he stood, and consisted of two bolts and a lock.

The bolts he drew without delay, and then set to work upon the lock.

In doing this he called the spike which he had broken off the other door into requisition.

By the exercise of some skill and patience, he succeeded in inserting its point into the box of the lock.

Having done this he used his iron bar as a lever, and at the second attempt he wrenched the box completely off.

There was one more obstacle overcome.

Again did the route to freedom lay open before him.

After listening for a moment and finding all was still, Jack passed through this door into the passage beyond.

As we have said, this passage communicated with the roof of the prison.

But Jack found that there would yet be some trouble in reaching it.

All the obstacles had not been overcome.

The one which he now witnessed was of far more formidable character than any of the others.

This was another door which was situated some distance down the passage.

Like most of the doors in the prison of Newgate, it was very securely fastened.

Jack tried to shake it into its setting, but in vain.

At this fresh and unexpected obstruction his spirits somewhat failed him, for he feared he should not be able to get out of the prison before daylight.

This feeling of dejection lasted but a few moments.

Shaking it off, he set to work upon this door with undiminished resolution.

As was the case with the last one, the fastenings were on the side nearest to him, which was a very great advantage.

As before, he drew the bolts, and then finding that the lock was all that he had to contend against, he endeavoured to wrench off the box in the same manner as he had done before.

But this one appeared to be more strongly screwed on than the other.

However, having inserted the spike, and got the iron bar in a favourable position, he exerted his utmost strength, and, to his satisfaction, the box gave way.

He pulled the door open eagerly, and darted through, not doubting that at last he had reached the entrance to the leads.

But he was doomed to a fresh disappointment.

Ere he had gone a dozen paces further, he came to another door, and this was the strongest and best-protected door of all, the one opening from his own cell alone expected.

It was, to use Jack Sheppard's own words, as quoted from his account of his escape, "guarded with more bolts, bars, and locks than any I had hitherto met with."

How to overcome this he knew not.

The labour he had already performed was really immense.

It was superhuman.

He felt the effects of his exertions most severely.

His strength seemed almost spent.

A very short time, comparatively speaking, had elapsed since he commenced his operations, and yet he had done more than several workmen could have done in a couple of days, even had they been furnished with tools suitable to the accomplishment of their purpose.

Perspiration streamed from him at every pore, and he panted and gasped for breath.

He would never have had courage enough to attack this door had it not been for the thought that this was, perhaps, the last obstacle which intervened between him and liberty.

Reanimated by this hope, he resumed his efforts.

But that strong door threatened to laugh all he could do to scorn.

The success he had met with in wrenching off the boxes of the doors made Jack attempt this means; but he failed.

This time his labour was in vain.

Panting and weary he rested again, to recover some portion of his expended strength.

Then, as a last desperate effort, he resolved to attack the fillet on the main post of the door, and to try whether he could not forcibly remove it.

To his joy he succeeded.

It was beyond his expectation.

With a crash the fillet came away, and brought the box of the lock away with it.

Once again, then, was the road open before him, but this time Jack almost dreaded to cross the threshold.

He was afraid that, as on former occasions, he would be able to proceed only a few paces before he met with an obstruction.

This was a weakness, though a pardonable one.

He overcame it.

Urged on by the necessity of being as speedy in his movements as possible, lest after all at the last moment he should be captured, he entered the gloomy passage which stretched beyond.

He would make a desperate effort now, for what more vexatious occurrence could be imagined than that of being captured after taking such incredible pains to get free.

No alarm appeared as yet to have been given, and with a trembling heart he crossed the threshold, and stepped cautiously along the passage beyond.

He groaned faintly, for suddenly he found his worst forebodings realised.

His progress was stopped by another door.*

He had not the heart to feel for the fastenings.

He leant up against the wall, and almost felt inclined to cease all further efforts.

As he stood in this dejected attitude, he fancied he could feel a current of cold air come through the crevices in the door.

This roused him.

That door, then, was surely all that intervened between him and the open air.

With desperate resolution, he determined to make one more trial.

He felt for the fastenings.

The first thing that his hand encountered was a bolt at the top.

This he drew instantly, and felt for the one which was no doubt at the bottom.

He drew this also, and then, to his amazement, the door creaked slowly open.

Those bolts, then, were all that secured it.

Beyond the door he could see the dull, night sky, while the cold air streamed in upon him.

At first, so totally unexpected was this piece of good fortune, he could scarcely bring himself to believe in the reality of what he saw before him.

He clutched the door-post, for he felt as though he was about to faint.

His head swam round and round.

The cool night air, however, playing soothingly upon his fevered body, soon recovered him.

He presently released his hold, and stood upright.

Then, with a reeling step, he crossed the threshold.

A frantic, maniacal shriek of joy which he could not repress announced the gladness he felt at once more standing beneath the arch of heaven, even though his feet rested on the roof of Newgate.

At this moment he felt himself a free man.

He experienced a fresh accession of strength.

Indeed, he became utterly forgetful of all the fatigue he had undergone.

For a moment it all passed away.

He drank in, with feverish eagerness, the cool, fresh air.

It was in truth sweet and delightful to him, who had for so long breathed the impure atmosphere of a dungeon.

He swallowed it in large quantities, and each inspiration that he took appeared to have the effect of endowing him with fresh strength.

"I am free!" he gasped—"free at last, although the difficulties in my way were so very numerous! Free—ha, ha!—I am free!"

He checked himself suddenly, for the thought struck him that he was congratulating himself just a little too soon.

To be sure he had gained the roof of the prison, but yet he was not exactly free, and most certainly he was not out of the reach of his foes.

This caused a slight abatement to his felicitations.

* The Author desires to state that in this account of Jack Sheppard's escape from Newgate, he has adhered with all possible closeness to Jack Sheppard's own statement, made and signed by him on the 10th November, 1724.

Stepping out on to the leads, he closed the door after him, and with much greater calmness looked about him.

He had to decide which way to go to reach the ground. This was rather a serious point, and one that it was necessary to perpend upon.

He had never been upon this part of the roof of the prison, and he now walked round and took in its general appearance.

He found he was shut in on all sides by a wall, for the roof of the other portions of the prison was much higher than that upon which he stood.

Indeed, he stood merely upon what were called by the officials the lower leads.

How, then, was he to gain the upper ones?

He travelled all round, and at length paused before a place where he fancied the wall was not quite so high as in others.

Here he resolved to make his attempt to ascend.

The roof was quite flat, or nearly so, and Jack retreated a few paces.

Then running forward, so as to give himself an impetus, he sprang up and caught hold of the top of the wall with the tips of his fingers.

This was enough.

With very little trouble he improved his grasp, and then, by calling into exercise the muscles in his arms, he drew his body until his breast was level with the top of the wall.

When he was in this position he was easily able to swing his legs up.

In another moment he was standing on the upper leads.

It was a clear, starlight night, and in the distance Jack could see the monster dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

This proved an excellent landmark to him.

He was now without doubt able to make his way in any direction he wished.

If he stood with the dome of St. Paul's on his right hand, then the Old Bailey would be on his left, and Newgate Street straight before him.

This was the position he took up, and having done so he crossed to the wall that looked down into the Old Bailey.

On arriving here a glance told him he was correct.

The street below was silent and deserted.

It seemed an impossibility to reach it, for the wall presented a sheer descent of many feet.

Convinced that to escape in that direction was quite out of the question, he crept along just inside the parapet until he came to the corner of Newgate Street.

Here he once more ventured to look over.

This street, like the Old Bailey, was quite deserted.

All the shops were closed, and not a single pedestrian or vehicle was in sight.

From where he now stood he could see down Skinner Street and Snow Hill, as well as up Giltspur Street, but in all of these the same state of things presented itself.

The steep wall was still below him without any break, so that unless he had had a long rope or a ladder it would be impossible to descend.

As he had neither of these, he kept on his way round the parapet, in the hope that he should presently come to a place where a descent might be more easily accomplished.

Arriving at the next corner of the wall, Jack looked over once again, and saw below him the roof of Wild's house.

The distance from the wall to it was not great, and by holding with his hands he doubtless could have lowered himself on to it without receiving any injury, or creating any alarm.

But Jack shook his head.

It was too much like jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire for him to think of getting on to the roof of Wild's house, however easily the feat could be performed, and without some powerful motive it was not likely he would run the risk of doing such a thing.

Had he but known, however, that Edgworth Bess was a prisoner within that dismal habitation, he would not have hesitated a single moment about jumping down and endeavouring to effect her release.

But he had no more knowledge about her than Jonathan had communicated, and supposing that to be true he pictured her lying at the point of death at some obscure habitation near the river, whither Jonathan had conveyed her after her leap into the Thames.

CHAPTER CCLXXXI.

WILD JUNIOR MAKES A TRAITORLY PROPOSAL TO EDGWORTH BESS.

AND here, doubtless, the poor girl would in reality have been had it not been for her own abortive effort to escape.

Now, however, as the reader is well aware, she was a prisoner in the thief-taker's house, and Wild junior had taken upon himself the task of keeping her in his safe keeping.

At the very moment that Jack stood upon the leads looking down on to the thief-takers' house, a scene was taking place within it between Edgworth Bess and the thief-taker's rascally son, which would have driven him frantic could he but have witnessed it.

But Jack remained profoundly ignorant not only of that, but of the fact of her being in the thief-taker's house at all.

Let us leave Jack upon the roof of Newgate, seeking about for some means of escape from that elevated and unpleasant position, while for a brief space we turn our attention to Edgworth Bess.

We will show the reader what was taking place while Jack Shoppard stood looking over the wall of Newgate on to the roof of Jonathan Wild's house.

We will show the reader that which was invisible to the individual to whom the knowledge was most necessary.

That Wild junior was not sincere in all his protestations of good faith to his amiable parent was quite certain.

Whether the thief-taker was sincere himself remains to be seen.

At any rate, his son was not, or he would never have kept up the deception about the papers, of which he had so cleverly gained possession, and so cunningly secreted.

He had a little game of his own to play, but he could not carry out his schemes without he kept on good terms with his parent.

When we last saw them that very desirable state of things appeared to be completely brought about.

It cannot be doubted that George Wild had some deeper motive than he expressed or allowed to be visible for advising the thief-taker to act as he did.

It may be presumed that he had some particular reason of his own for professing his willingness to watch over Edgworth Bess in her imprisonment, and be answerable for her safe keeping.

He had a motive, and it was not long before it developed itself.

There was one point, however, upon which Wild junior was perfectly sincere.

That was his wound.

He had received several very severe injuries, and had he not to a great extent inherited the iron constitution of his parent he would not have been able to do as he did.

At times he suffered the most intolerable anguish from the pistol wound he had received, but each day showed an improvement in it.

As for Edgworth Bess, she demanded all the attentions of Mr. Snoxall for several days, but she eventually grew better.

On the night when Jack was endeavouring to achieve an escape from his cell, she was stronger and better than she had ever been.

As she happened to be of more value to Wild alive than dead every possible attention was paid to her.

Up to this night, Wild junior had kept his watch in the adjoining apartment in the most exemplary manner.

But in the long solitary hours which he passed while doing so, his busy brain created and pondered over a thousand schemes.

He hit upon one at last which seemed as though it would answer his purpose exactly.

He thought of it under every aspect, and finally he muttered:

"Yes—yes, that will do? Excellent—most excellent! Shall I wait a little longer or make the attempt at once. I must pause a little and decide. Blueskin and Jack Sheppard are both safe enough, that's quite certain. They cannot come in between us. Then the gov'nor, he's out of the way for a bit! I will try it! I will see this girl, and I will try what smooth words and fair promises will accomplish. If I can only win her round to me—if I can establish such a claim upon her gratitude as she cannot resist—if I can make her my wife!—Ha, ha!—then all

will be well! I shall laugh at the gov'nor then with all his d—d cleverness. The heiress will be mine, and I shall have all the papers necessary! Ha, ha! Capital!

The ruminations and congratulations upon the part of the thief-taker's son will give a tolerable insight into his intentions, and it will soon be seen how he set to work to carry them into effect.

Having decided upon his course, he waited until all within the house had retired to bed, save and except the two men downstairs who were always on the watch all the night long.

For a reason which will presently be given, he knew he had nothing to fear from his father in the shape of interruption.

The course would never be clearer before him than on that night, and he resolved not to omit to avail himself of so favourable a conjunction of circumstances.

With a stealthy step he approached the door of the room in which he sat on guard, and opening it, looked out on to the landing and listened.

The silence of the very grave itself prevailed.

Reassured by the silence, Wild junior stepped quietly on to the landing, and approached the door of the room in which Edgworth Bess was confined.

He tapped at it gently with his knuckles, and waited for a response.

None came.

He tapped again, and this time with greater loudness than before.

This time he was heard, for a voice said:

"Who is there?"

"A friend," replied Wild junior, in a voice just loud enough to make itself heard through the door—"a friend," he repeated; "one who will aid you to escape."

He grinned much in the fashion that his father would have done as he spoke, and taking a key from his pocket, he fitted it into the lock and turned it.

He next withdrew the bolts, and then he entered.

Edgworth Bess was standing near the threshold.

"Hush!" said George, in a mysterious whisper—"hush! Do not speak a word until I have closed the door! If you do, we shall be overheard!"

Scarcely knowing what to do or how to act, Edgworth Bess obeyed.

But her limbs trembled, and her heart was filled with forebodings of coming evil.

George Wild closed the door, and advanced towards her.

But Edgworth Bess shrank back as she said, in tones of aversion:

"Hence! I know you not! You are no friend of mine, but a foe, for it is you who keep guard over this chamber!"

"Hush!" said Wild junior, again, who was not in the least taken aback by this reception. "Do not speak so loud, or you will ruin all! What you say is perfectly true, but I am disposed to stand your friend if you will allow me to do so! I know I guard this chamber; I was set to do it by Jonathan Wild, and I am answerable to him with my life for your safe custody. But, as I said before, I am willing to serve you and assist you to escape if you will allow me to do so!"

"Oh, sir, I know not whether to trust you! I have been so deceived by those who I thought could have been wholly trusted, that—that—"

"You have suspicions now of everyone who offers to be your friend!"

"Pardon me if I am unjust in your instance," replied Edgworth Bess; "but I must answer yes!"

"Oh, I pardon you freely enough; you are quite right to be suspicious of everybody, and more especially of me, your gaoler! But if you will listen to me, I will convince you that I am sincere!"

"Oh, sir, if you can do that I shall be glad indeed! I will listen to you with all earnestness! To be free, I would give anything; for to be in this dreadful house, in the power of Jonathan Wild, is worse than death itself!"

"Exactly; and now I can come to the point without any trouble. I think you said just now, that you would give anything to escape?"

"Yes—yes!" replied Edgworth Bess, hesitatingly.

"Then that is the proof of my sincerity; for, look you, I do not profess to set you free for the mere sake of doing so, or for your particular benefit; but for the sake of the reward which I shall obtain from you for so doing!"

"Reward?"

"Yes."

"But I have no money!"

"I know that, but I am willing to trust you—give you credit! I understand more of your affairs than you do yourself; if you have not money now, you will have it!"

"I ought to have it! It is my right!"

"And you shall have it; because, you see, it is to my interest to help you to it. I shall want a little security, that's all!"

"What security do I possess?"

"Are you willing to give the security I require?"

"What is it?"

"If I set you free, and enable you to obtain possession of what is lawfully yours, will you—when you are firmly established—will you reward me?"

"Certainly!"

"Will you swear that, when all is done that I have said, that you will give me the reward when I demand it?"

"What amount do you require?"

"That is an important point in the present stage of the affair. You do not know what I may have to do, nor what services I may be able to render you, so that it would be difficult to estimate the amount of the reward. I shall leave that to you! I merely want, just as a security, your solemn promise, or your oath that, when I have done what I profess, you will reward me!"

Edgworth Bess hesitated.

She did not like the idea of making such an unconditional promise.

Wild junior observed her hesitation.

"It is quite right for you to think over the matter; but the fact is, you see before you a man who is desirous of bettering his condition! I make no disguise about the matter; I am willing to assist you, simply because I believe that I shall advantage myself by so doing! Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly well!"

"Is it a bargain?"

"I can scarcely reply."

"Why not?"

"I should prefer to know what your expectations are! You must forgive me if I am suspicious. The reason is, I have been made the unsuspecting victim of so much villany."

"I don't mind your suspicions," said George Wild, with an affectionate frank off-handedness—"I don't mind your suspicions, and I think I can remove your doubts and fears about the reward!"

"Indeed! How so?"

"I will claim none."

"Claim none?"

"Even so."

"But I do not understand you!"

"Is it possible? I thought my meaning was clear enough! I will explain."

"Pray do so."

"I will do all that I have promised if you will undertake to reward me. I shall require your oath to that effect; but as to the reward itself, I shall leave the nature of it and the amount entirely in your hands. Do you understand now?"

"I think I do."

"I shall make no demand upon you. When all is done I will present myself before you and say, 'I have done all that I promised to do, and I ask for my reward.' I shall leave it to your own generosity; you shall give me as much or as little as you think proper. But you will admit that, when the service is performed, you will be better able to estimate the worth of it than you are now!"

"Certainly I shall!"

"Do you understand me now?"

"I think so."

"Nay, are you not sure?"

"Yes; I am sure I understand you."

"That is enough, then. I must leave you now. I have already stayed too long. During my absence you will be able to think over what I have said, and make up your mind whether you think it worth your while to agree to my terms. For my own part, I cannot help thinking that they are very fair and straightforward indeed."

"Well, then, leave me," said Edgworth Bess, "and I will give your proposal an attentive consideration. I have

no one to advise with or consult but myself, and I do not wish to decide upon any course of action with too much precipitation."

"I like you all the better," said George, "for taking such a business-like view of the question as that. It makes me think that we shall eventually come to an understanding with each other. Good night, lady; I leave you until to-morrow night, when I will ask for your reply."

With these words, Wild junior left the room.

But by the time he gained his own apartment his countenance wore a totally different appearance.

"Ha, ha! The first step is taken!" he said. "I have succeeded beyond all hope or anticipation. Ha, ha! I shall win yet!"

CHAPTER CCLXXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD SUCCEEDS IN MAKING HIS ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE.

SUCH was the scene that was taking place while Jack Sheppard looked over the parapet of Newgate on to Jonathan Wild's house.

But he had no idea of it.

Could he but have been an auditor and spectator of that interview, how quickly he would have put Edgworth Bess upon her guard.

He would not have been deceived by George Wild's speciousness.

He knew, from what Blueskin had told him, that the thief-taker's son was a thousand times more to be dreaded than the thief-taker himself.

He would have known in a moment that some deep villainy or other was in contemplation.

But, alas for her, Edgworth Bess did not possess this knowledge!

There seemed to be, indeed, every probability that she would fall an easy prey into the hands of George Wild.

That individual himself fancied so, and he felicitated himself accordingly, as he pictured the ultimate result of his plot.

Clever as Jonathan Wild undoubtedly was, yet it seemed as though he would be overmatched by his son.

Leaving them, however, for the present, we will return to Jack, upon the roof of Newgate.

Having made up his mind that it would never answer his purpose to descend on to the roof of Wild's house, he turned away, and crept still further along the parapet.

The direction in which he now went took him towards Newgate Market, and presently, as he looked down, he saw beneath him the roof of a house.

It was at no great distance down, and he could see that the garret window was swinging open.

This seemed to point at once to the route for freedom.

But the difficulty was to reach the roof, which was a slanting one.

The distance to it was not so great but that he could have dropped safely on to it, but then, owing to the steepness and slipperiness of the tiles, he would never have been able to retain his footing.

How, then, was he to proceed?

He had no rope, and nothing that would serve in lieu of one, by which he could gradually make the descent.

This was a puzzler, and Jack perplexed his brains in vain to find a solution of the difficulty.

He measured the distance again and again, and calculated the chances of being able to let himself down on to the roof and retain his footing; but each time he was reluctantly forced to admit that the chances of success were so slight as to make it too great a risk.

Time, too, was passing, and he dreaded each moment as he lingered to hear an alarm indicative that his absence from his cell had been discovered.

Then, to be taken after working so hard and accomplishing so much,—to be taken while standing, as it were, upon the very threshold of liberty—the thought was too terrible, and Jack felt that he would run any risk rather than this should happen.

Suddenly, a thought occurred to him, but it involved so much danger and risk of discovery that he was almost ready to discard it as soon as it had glanced across his mind.

But the thought came back again, and really it seemed

to present the only means by which the roof below could be safely reached.

It seemed as though he would be compelled to adopt this resource.

What was it?

The reader will start at the boldness of the idea.

In his cell—the cell from which he had with so much difficulty made his way—there was an old blanket or coverlet, which he had used to keep off the cold to some extent while sleeping.

It was the only thing in the shape of bedding which the officials had allowed him.

This blanket, torn into strips and tied together, would form a rope by the aid of which he could descend in safety to the roof of the house below.

But Jack Sheppard, even with all his boldness, shrank somewhat from the idea of running into the lion's mouth, for such it would be to return to the cell for the purpose of fetching the blanket.

But this was the feat he had in contemplation—surely the most desperate of any that he had performed.

To wait and hesitate would, however, do no good, and at length, unable to think of any other means by which he could complete his escape, Jack turned back, resolved at all hazards to retrace his steps to his cell and fetch the blanket.

If he could only succeed in doing this without raising any alarm, all the rest would be easy.

He would be able to get clear off.

But it was something to be wondered at that he had done so much as he had already without attracting the attention of someone, or without his being missed from his place of confinement.

But having once made up his mind, Jack did not hesitate.

With a quick, bold step, he crossed the leads towards that part of the lower roof from which he had ascended.

Arriving here, he lowered himself down with much greater ease than he had got up.

A push opened the door, which he had closed after him, and he re-entered the passage.

The doors, however, between him and the chapel were no longer able to obstruct his progress.

He passed through them with undiminished speed.

Arriving at the chapel, he made his way cautiously across the stone-paved floor, and felt for the door over which he had climbed after breaking away the spike.

Not without some difficulty, owing to the profound darkness in this place, he found it.

Little did he think on the former occasion that he should so soon force his way again through the same aperture.

In another moment the corridor was gained.

Here he paused to listen.

But no sound broke upon the silence.

Clearly his escape had not been discovered as yet.

Jack stopped no longer than was necessary just to convince him that all was well, and then he directed his steps towards his cell, or rather to the Red-room over it.

At the door of this he presently arrived.

Entering this, he made his way towards the fireplace where he had made the hole in the floor.

Then, with as much care as he could, he lowered himself into the abyss.

Another moment saw him standing in his cell.

But what a different cell it now seemed to be.

He was conscious that he had the power to leave the moment he thought proper.

Again Jack listened, and again all was still.

Reassured by this, Jack possessed himself of the blanket which he had run such a fearful risk to obtain.

Rolling it up into the smallest possible compass he prepared to return.

Up the chimney he went into the Red-room.

From there to the Chapel.

Thence to the leads.

In his hurried course he had paused to listen once or twice, and each time he set forward with fresh confidence, for the silence remained unbroken.

Throwing the blanket up first, Jack then climbed up to the higher portion of the prison roof in the same manner as he had previously done.

Then snatching up this precious article he crossed the leads to the spot from which he had resolved to descend.

Arriving here, he took up the blanket and saw that it was sufficiently large to allow him to tear it up into three portions.

This he did by the aid of his teeth and hands.

His next proceeding was to tie these three pieces securely together.

Then lowering them down he was rejoiced to find that he had a rope sufficiently long to answer his purpose.

But a fresh difficulty presented itself.

How was he to make fast one end of the blanket upon the wall while he lowered himself down by its aid.

It would require to be fastened very strongly so as to bear his weight.

Should it give way he would inevitably be dashed to pieces.

But as he looked around him, Jack could see no place to which he could secure it.

At this fresh and unexpected obstacle he lost all patience.

But he did not long give way to this feeling.

After accomplishing what he had it was not likely that he would allow himself to be conquered by this.

But he looked about, and felt about, in vain for some object to which the blanket could be attached.

There was nothing but the bare walls.

He had almost began to despair of making available the blanket which he had run so much danger to obtain, when he bethought himself of the spike which he had broken off the door leading into the Chapel.

This had already done him good service, and it might prove to be of still further use to him.

It was just possible that by the aid of the iron bar he might be able to drive the spike in between two of the stones with sufficient firmness to answer his purpose.

He resolved to try.

If this failed he was sure there was another resource.

Taking the spike from his pocket, and picking up the iron bar, he selected a spot which he imagined would best answer his purpose.

Then he commenced to knock the spike in.

The mortar was hard, and the iron entered it with difficulty.

When about half buried, Jack seized the spike and pulled with his utmost strength.

But it was immovable.

With a feeling of the greatest joy and satisfaction about his heart, he tied the blanket to the spike.

At length he had triumphed over every obstacle, insuperable as some had seemed, and he was about to bid farewell to the gloomy prison of Newgate.

Having tied the blanket to the spike, Jack lowered his rope until it hung at full length.

Even then the end was some distance from the roof, but he thought if he had hold of the extreme end of the rope his feet would almost touch the tiles.

At least he resolved to make the attempt.

Slowly and cautiously then he committed himself to the frail rope.

Should it break, or one of his hastily-tied knots give way, nothing would save him from an instantaneous and painful death.

Gently Jack allowed the blanket to slip through his fingers.

As he got lower and lower he swayed about from side to side by the wind, and was at times dashed so violently against the stone walls of the prison as to make him terribly apprehensive as to whether the blanket would bear such sudden and repeated strains.

He quickened his descent, which was the only thing it lay in his power to do.

At length his hands grasped the extreme end of the rope.

But now he swung about more than ever.

He looked down as well as he could.

The roof of the house was at no great distance below, still, as he hung down, the slanting portion was beneath him, and it would require great care to alight upon it and retain his footing.

He tried to cling closer to the wall, and then having got his body tolerably steady, he let go.

He fell only a few inches, but to him it seemed many feet.

His feet slipped from under him.

He gasped for breath, as he thought he was hastening to his death.

He clutched wildly at the slight projections in the tiles, but he did nothing more than break his nails and bruise his fingers.

Still, by his efforts, he succeeded in diminishing the rapidity of his descent until at length his feet touched gently the bottom of the parapet with which the roof of the house was protected.

Here he remained for a few moments, wholly unable to move.

He was utterly exhausted.

But the imminent danger of remaining where he was roused him quickly into action.

Raising his head he looked for the open garret window.

It was within a short distance of him.

Encouraged by its proximity he endeavoured to approach it.

Slowly, for his strength seemed to have almost wholly deserted him, he crept towards it.

His hand at length grasped the window sill.

He peeped in.

The interior of the garret was profoundly dark, and from this circumstance, and the fact of the window being open, Jack concluded that it was empty.

He drew himself up still further.

He remained for a moment before the window in such a manner that if anyone had been inside the room they must have seen him.

But all continued silent, and Jack now feeling tolerably convinced that he had the place all to himself came still nearer, until at length he stepped over the window sill and stood inside the garret.

When once here his first proceeding was to close the window and fasten it, in order to destroy as much as possible the traces of the route he took.

CHAPTER CCCLXXIV.

JACK SHEPPARD FINDS THAT THERE ARE STILL OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME BEFORE HE CAN REACH THE STREET.

JACK SHEPPARD had become so accustomed to darkness that notwithstanding the garret into which he had thus intruded received no more light than came through the little window from the night sky, yet he was able to see about him with tolerable ease.

At any rate he distinguished the door immediately, and lost no time in making his way towards it.

His intention was to steal down the stairs as quietly as he possibly could and get out at the front door.

The silence which prevailed seemed to indicate that the whole of the inhabitants of the dwelling had retired to rest, and the lateness of the hour strengthened this supposition.

It was so late that even in London few persons would be found out of bed.

This was very favourable to Jack, who did not doubt that he had skill enough to descend the stairs and pass out of the front door without awakening the inhabitants.

Without loss of time then he opened the door leading out of the garret, and having done this he stood still and listened.

He started.

From below there came the unmistakable sounds of merriment and jollification.

Jack grasped the door-post and leaned out over the stairs to assure himself that he had not been deceived.

His sense of hearing had not played him false.

Laughter and loud voices could be heard distinctly.

"Curse this!" Jack muttered, when there was no longer room for a doubt. "Curse this, it will spoil all! What am I to do? If I attempt to descend I shall surely be discovered by someone."

This was such an unlooked-for and unexpected event that, as we have seen, it seriously discomposed Jack when he first became cognisant of it.

"This will not do!" he added, after a brief pause. "I must not be balked by this. The danger is so much increased; and as for those who may attempt to stop me, let them beware!"

With these half-spoken words upon his lips, Jack commenced the descent of the stairs.



BLUESKIN INCAPACITATES JONATHAN WILD FROM GIVING EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM.

He soon found that he could not proceed so quietly as he wished and fancied he should be able to do so.

The fetlocks which yet remained round his ankles prevented him from moving noiselessly.

Nevertheless he crept down the stairs with all the stealthfulness he could command.

Upon reaching the landing that was next beneath him he paused a moment.

At present he was certain he had given no alarm.

The stairs beneath seemed dark and silent.

After listening again he concluded that the sounds he heard came from the first floor, while he was standing on the third.

To descend to the second floor would not then be attended with so great an amount of danger.

It would be the descent of the next flight which would call for so much circumspection.

Slowly and quietly Jack made his way on to the landing on the second floor.

Then he looked over the balusters.

No. 77.—BLUESKIN.

A faint gleam of light shot up from below.

While standing where he did he could not see from whence it proceeded, but a slight change of position enabled him to do so.

He crept half-way down the flight leading to the first floor.

Here there was a bend in the stairs, and here he paused. He now commanded a view of the first-floor landing.

The gleam of light came through a partially closed door.

Jack was convinced in a moment that this door led into the room where the company was assembled.

Someone was singing a song in rather a boisterous tone of voice.

At the end of each verse there was the jingling of glasses as they were clinked against each other for chorus.

No one knows how that song grated upon Jack's ears.

While he stood deliberating whether to descend, the voices ceased.

The singing was succeeded by the murmur of conversation.

If Jack remained until a change took place he would probably have to wait till after daylight.

At all hazards he resolved to descend.

The only danger would be in passing the door.

That would not take him a moment.

It was now more than ever necessary that his progress should be noiseless.

Down the remaining stairs he crept without causing a sound.

He was within a few steps of the door when the fetters on his ankles clanked together.

"What noise is that?" he heard a voice ask in tones of terror.

It was a woman's voice.

"Don't be frightened!" said another voice.

This was a man's.

The accents were thick, evidently from the effects of drink.

Another cried:

"Oh, it's only the dog, or the cat, perhaps."

More than this Jack did not wait to hear.

Fearful of proceeding he retreated, and ascended the stairs with marvellous celerity and silence.

Perhaps it was as well he acted thus.

Those who occupied the room came to the door with candles in their hands and looked about them.

As there was nothing to be seen the noise was set down to the cause assigned for it.

As they were about to re-enter the room and sit down again someone came up from the lower part of the house.

It was the servant.

She was questioned, but could give no solution to the mysterious sound.

They then retired to the room again.

Jack congratulated himself upon his luck in happening to turn back, for had he descended the other stairs he would have encountered the servant, and his discovery would have taken place.

But what was to be done now?

The act of passing by the half-open door was ten times more dangerous than before, for now those within would be doubly on the look-out.

Jack pressed his hands to his head, uncertain how to act.

At this moment there came over him such a feeling of utter fatigue and exhaustion that it was with difficulty that he retained his feet.

Indeed, had he not suddenly clutched the balusters he would have fallen to the ground.

He was now beginning to feel the effects of his tremendous exertions.

"I must rest!" he gasped. "I must rest! It will be folly for me to go in the street while in this frightful state of weakness. I must rest a little while. I will creep back to the attic and lie down there a little while. I shall be safe, for my escape will not be discovered until the turnkeys go the first round in the morning."

This did not seem the most prudent of resolutions to take, but, nevertheless, Jack acted upon it.

There was no certainty whatever as to the time when his escape would be discovered, and his proximity to Newgate could not fail to be dangerous.

Yet, on the other hand, as he has truly said, it was perfect folly for him to think of getting into the street while in such a desperate state of fatigue as he then was.

He felt as though he could scarcely place one foot before the other to mount the stairs.

At length, however, to his satisfaction the door of the attic was reached.

He pushed it open and entered.

The chamber was unfurnished.

The articles it contained were some boxes and other lumber piled up in one corner.

But Jack did not care for this.

As soon as he had got inside he closed the door behind him and lay down at full length on the floor.

But he took care to do so in such a manner as to make it impossible for the door to be opened without awakening him.

Then, with a hardihood scarcely to be comprehended, he closed his eyes and went to sleep.

He knew that this would give him a fresh lease of strength.

But who, save Jack Sheppard, could have slept soundly as he did under such circumstances.

Had he been surrounded with every security, and had his limbs reposed upon the softest of feather beds, he could not have slept more quietly and dreamlessly than he did.

But his slumber was not of long duration.*

As soon as Nature had to some extent recuperated herself, his mind began to exercise itself.

In his sleep he went over all his past actions.

He dreamt all that had occurred to him up to the moment he laid himself down, and then he fancied a body of police-officers burst into the room and pounced upon him while he slept.

So vivid was this fancy that it awoke him.

He even started struggling to his feet.

But he soon discovered that the danger existed in his own imagination only, and he calmed himself.

His brain was for a moment or two rather confused, but he quickly gathered his senses about him.

How long he had slept he was unable to form any idea.

One thing, however, was quite certain, it was not yet daybreak, nor could he perceive the slightest signs of the coming dawn.

Once more he opened the door, listened, and crept down the stairs again.

In a few minutes he got in sight of the door which had proved so serious an obstacle to his escape.

He could still hear voices.

He crouched down upon the stairs and listened.

"Not a moment more, my good sir," he heard a man's voice say. "D—d—don't mind me! All jolly you know! Keep the pot boiling—(hiccup)—and all that sort of thing! But I must go. I promised—(hic)—promised—and—hic—"

"He's promised his wife," said another voice, the tones of which were decidedly uproarious. "He's promised his wife to go home. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" was laughed in chorus by the whole of the guests.

"No, no—gemmen! Upon my word," said the first speaker. "It's too—too bad—(hic)—to say—(hic)—such a thing as that. But I must go; I can't stay any longer."

"Oh, never mind your wife, old boy. Stop along with me. Don't desert your friends. We'll all go home with the milk in the morning!"

"Ha, ha! Bravo! Yes! So we will!" said a number of excited voices.

"Sorry to leave you—(hic)—gemmen; very sorry! But upon my word, I can't stop—I can't, indeed!"

"Well, good night, old fellow! Never mind your missus! Wait a minute, and I'll ring the bell for the servant to come with the candle. You won't be able to find your way down in the dark."

The tinkling of a bell in the lower regions of the house now struck upon Jack's ears.

"I will make a bold rush for it," he muttered. "It is certain destruction if I remain here."

He could now hear the servant ascending, and presently after he caught sight of her.

She was carrying a candle.

"Show this gentleman downstairs to the door, Sarah. Light him carefully, for the stairs are awkward, you know!"

"Good night, gemmen!" said the individual, who for some reason or other was so desirous to be gone, and whose mode of speech showed that he was far gone in intoxication. "Good night, gemmen! Sorry to leave you! Enjoy yourselves! Good night!"

"Good night to you, old fellow!" responded several, speaking all at once—"Good night to you!"

The servant, with the candle in her hand, now came out on to the landing.

She was closely followed by the departing guest, who pulled the door close shut after him.

Jack was rejoiced.

He had resolved to follow this pair downstairs and then watch his opportunity to slip out.

The inebriated gentleman said something to the girl, but Jack did not heed what.

They began to go down.

* Jack Sheppard actually did return to the garret and sleep exactly in the manner here described—that is, if his own confession is to be believed.

Jack descended to the first-floor landing. Then he crossed it and passed the door. He commenced the descent of the stairs communicating with the ground floor.

The gleam of the candle which the servant carried flickered feebly upon the walls.

He could hear the murmur of their voices as they preceded him.

From their manner it was easy to conclude that they had no idea anyone was following them.

Jack was careful not to get too close, for fear he should be overheard.

He had everything to fear from an immediate alarm.

Cautiously he crept down, taking pains not to decrease the distance between them.

Suddenly a door closed, and the light vanished instantly from Jack's view.

It was the door at the bottom of the stairs.

In one more moment he reached it.

He pushed it open and cast a hasty glance along the passage.

A gush of cold air came upon his face, and he saw the servant standing on the door-step.

Jack approached her with rapid yet stealthful strides.

When he reached the door she turned round.

They confronted each other.

The girl opened her mouth to scream.

But Jack did not lose his presence of mind for a single instant.

With the rapidity of thought he seized the candle and thrust it, lighted as it was, into the girl's mouth.

The servant's scream and the flame of the candle were extinguished at the same moment.

Jack did not wait for more, but darted out into the street with the velocity of an arrow.

CHAPTER CCLXXV.

JACK SHEPPARD FLIES FOR SAFETY TO THE COUNTRY, AND SEKS SHELTER IN A RUINED HUT.

ONCE more, contrary to the expectations of everyone, Jack Sheppard stood a free man in the streets of London.

Slackening his speed only a very little, he made his way past St. Sepulchre's Watch-house.

With his heart full of elation, he called out "Good morrow!" to the watchman and continued on his way.

Down Snow Hill and up Holborn he went, leaving St. Andrew's Watch on the left.

He passed the Watch-house at Holborn Bars, and turned down Gray's Inn Lane.

This portion of London was then very different to what it is to-day.

Gray's Inn was then a comparatively new and modern-looking edifice.

But beyond this, going towards King's Cross, there was scarcely a house to be seen.

Green fields and trees were about him on every side.

Summoning what strength he had, Jack hastened on.

He knew that when his escape was discovered the closest search would be made after him.

His best plan then would be to get as far away from London as he could in the shortest possible space of time.

He fancied that if he took his course straight off into the country his enemies would be baffled in their search for him.

About his ultimate proceedings he had thought nothing.

He knew from former experience the fatality of laying his plans far in advance.

So many events might occur of which he could form no previous conception, every one of which would have the effect of totally deranging whatever plans he might have formed.

Jack then was content to keep before him the one idea of getting out of the way of whatever pursuit might be commenced after him.

He argued reasonably enough that he had left no track behind him.

He was certain there was nothing which would indicate that he had gone into this part of the country.

He had gone north, but his foes would not be able to tell whether he had gone south, east, or west.

Inspired by this feeling, he kept on at a run for a long way.

He would no doubt have plenty of time to think about his future proceedings when he had found some temporary asylum.

His feet were still encumbered with the fetters, and they galled and fretted the skin about his ankles terribly.

Gradually his pace slackened, until at length his run became a walk.

Still it was a brisk walk, and one that got over the ground with great rapidity.

He could see no signs of it as yet, but still he felt certain that the dawn was close at hand.

The whole face of the heavens had, however, become covered with one huge cloud of a dull greyish tint, which concealed the first rays of daylight.

Jack did not keep along the main road, but turned slightly to the left, across the fields.

For the most part, he took his way along the footpaths that ran behind the hedges with which the meadows were defended.

In this manner he was able to keep his body concealed from the view of any persons who might be travelling the high road.

He wished, if possible, to reach some quiet country place without being seen by a single soul.

In this endeavour he had so far succeeded.

At times, however, a deadly and terrible sensation of faintness would come over him.

It was the result of his superhuman exertions.

Nothing save the conviction, ever before his mind, that upon his speed depended the ultimate success of his escape would have enabled him to proceed.

To add to his discomfort, rain now began to fall.

At first, the drops came slowly; but they soon increased, until the rain came down like a perfect sheet of water.

Jack was wet through in a moment.

He still toiled on.

If anything, the coolness of the air was pleasing to him.

Perspiration streamed from his body at every pore, and the rain rose from his garments converted into vapour.

He had now travelled a long way.

Quite far enough to answer his purposes he thought, and therefore he began to look about him for some place of shelter.

He had a tolerably good idea whereabouts he was.

He had made up his mind he was in the fields somewhere near Tottenham Court, and this was indeed the fact.

But, though he looked all around him, Jack was unable to perceive habitation of any sort, or even the signs of one.

To be sure he could not see far in consequence of the thickness of the atmosphere and the descending rain.

He was though in a place where dwellings were far apart.

It was not Jack's wish to enter any inhabited place for fear he should be suspected.

And that suspicion would be aroused seemed certain, for how could he conceal the fetters which still clung round his legs?

They were partially hidden it is true, but they would nevertheless have been discovered.

He wanted some place that was just possible to afford him shelter.

Some place where he could remain out of sight during the day, and from which he could emerge unsuspected at night.

The difficulty was where to find such a place.

Jack trudged on steadily.

The rain came down without abatement.

In respect to the effect it would have in keeping people out of the fields, it was perhaps a favourable circumstance to Jack.

A dim, misty-grey light stole over the face of Nature, showing that day had fairly begun, but not a human being could Jack Sheppard see.

Nor could he find a place such as he wished for.

So tired was he, that at times he almost felt inclined to lie down under the hedge and rest there.

But the risk of being seen made him resolve not to adopt the expedient until he was actually forced to it.

Presently, to his joy he saw a few fields off a building which promised to answer his purpose.

Inspired with this hope he forsook the path he had been following, and directed his steps towards it.

Upon a nearer approach he found it was a kind of labourer's cottage, such as are seen dotted about a farm.

But it was in a state of the utmost dilapidation, and on that wet morning looked inexpressibly dreary and wretched.

Jack hastened towards it with a lightened heart.

He was sure no one was within the building, for the door was swinging open.

In appearance it more resembled a huge shed than aught else.

Upon reaching the door Jack leaned forward and peeped in.

The interior had even a more shed-like view than the exterior, for on the floor there was a small quantity of damp, decaying straw, which indicated that cattle of some kind or other had been placed there.

Jack gave a sigh of relief.

The silence that reigned all round convinced him that he had the place all to himself.

"At last," he murmured, "at last I have found a place of shelter!"

Before he entered, however, he took the precaution to look all around him over the fields as far as he could see, in order to ascertain whether there was anyone watching his movements.

But apparently not a single human being was in sight; and, feeling tolerably secure from interruption, Jack entered the hut.

He hesitated for a moment or two whether he should leave the door open, as he found it, or close it.

The first he fancied was most prudent, but then the cold and the rain blew in so terribly that he felt he could not remain without the door was closed.

Not without some trouble, he pulled it to; and, in order to retain it in this position, he was obliged to place a stone against it.

The hut was then rendered a great deal more comfortable.

He next gathered up what straw there was lying about the floor and placed it in one corner.

Upon this rude bed he lay down with a feeling of the deepest thankfulness about his heart.

It would be impossible to describe the feeling of fatigue which he experienced.

Every bone and muscle in his body ached, while his legs were terribly swollen and bruised by the fetters.

Much as they galled him, Jack made no attempt to take them off.

He was too tired to do anything save lie down.

When he had rested himself he promised he would try what could be done.

It was nothing but natural that having once laid down Nature should seek to restore herself by sleep.

No sooner did Jack's eyes close than he fell off into a profound and dreamless slumber, in which he forgot not only his past sufferings and present fatigue, but his future trials.

This sleep continued for many hours without intermission.

When he finally awoke it was broad daylight.

He sprang to his feet and looked about him.

He could see nothing to cause apprehension.

He went to the door of the hut, and, opening it, peeped out.

The rain still continued to fall steadily.

Not a single being was in sight, and so heavily and incessantly had the rain come down that it lay upon the ground in large pools of water.

Jack turned away from this cheerless prospect with a shudder.

Still he had much to be thankful for.

Owing to the sky continuing to be obscured with clouds he was unable to see the sun.

Could he but have ascertained its position in the sky he would have been able to form some idea as to how far the day was advanced.

As it was he could not tell whether it was morning or afternoon.

One thing, however, was quite certain.

By this time his escape had been most certainly discovered, and a pursuit commenced.

But he had been left undisturbed, and from this he argued that his foes had failed to get upon his track.

Here then was ample room for hope and congratulation.

Jack shut the door again, and then rested himself upon his straw couch.

His feet and ankles pained him excessively, and he proceeded to examine them.

The bazils, or iron rings, around his ankles were of thick iron, and had been fastened on with a rivet.

The only means by which they could be removed were by filing through them, or else by means of a hammer and a small punch to drive the rivets out with.

The first would be a work of time, but Jack was not able to perform it.

No tongue could tell how bitterly he regretted the breakage of the two files.

He had thrown the fragments aside as being useless, but now he wished he had one of them.

That was a vain wish.

He fancied that if the piece had been ever so small he should have been able to achieve his purpose.

But what was to be done?

It was quite certain the fetters would have to be removed, but how was he to get rid of them?

The second means of taking them off was quite out of the question, for he had neither hammer nor punch, nor could he see the slightest prospect of being able to obtain possession of either of these two articles.

To leave his present place of concealment while they hung dangling at his heels would be to ensure discovery.

What was to be done?

He resolved to think.

First of all he produced all the money he had remaining in his pocket, and counted it up.

He found he possessed between forty and fifty shillings.

This was all the money he had in the world.

This was not over consoling, and he returned the coins to his pocket again.

The pangs of hunger and thirst began, too, to make themselves felt, and he was without the means of assuaging either.

Nor would be able to do so until he had got rid of the fetters.

He racked his brain in vain to think of some means by which he could get out of them.

It was to no purpose, however.

He was obliged to give up in despair.

In this miserable manner he passed the time until he was warned by the increase of darkness of the approach of night.

He went to the door again and looked out.

The rain had ceased, but the atmosphere was thick and heavy.

Night was coming on with rapid strides.

As before, no one was in sight.

Jack stood for some time leaning with his back against the door-post looking out, watching night close in.

As he did so he felt the craving for food increase to an intolerable degree.

"I must have food," he said. "I must have it at all risks. If I remain here I shall neither obtain that nor get rid of my fetters, and yet both must be done. Let me think—let me think! Yes, that will do!"

Jack had thought of a plan, and he now went back into the hut to carry it into execution.

This was to try whether he could not conceal his irons in a more effectual manner than he had done when he tied them up so hastily in the dungeon.

At any rate his sole chance was to conceal them so as not to attract attention.

This task occupied him some time, but at length feeling somewhat satisfied as to the result, he rose to his feet.

Favoured by the darkness of the night he hoped to be able to escape detection.

At any rate he resolved to make the attempt.

He approached the door of the hut—looked forth for a moment, and then, fancying the coast was clear glided off into the darkness.

CHAPTER CCCLXXVI.

BLUESKIN STABS JONATHAN WILD IN THE ANTECHAMBER, AND SO INCAPACITATES HIM FROM GIVING HIS EVIDENCE.

THE proceedings of Jack Sheppard have of late been of so important and highly interesting a character that we have been unable to break the thread of the narrative until the present moment.

Now, however, as he is menaced by no immediate danger, we will leave him and return to the doings of other characters in our narrative.

To do so, we shall be obliged to go back many hours. Blueskin has received no share of attention lately, although in so perilous a predicament; and we have also to account for that which puzzled Jack so much, namely, the non-appearance at the accustomed hours of his old enemy Jonathan Wild.

The reader may be sure something of an unusual character must have taken place, or Jack would have seen something of his pursuers.

Let us, however, describe events as far as possible in the order in which they took place.

To begin then with Jonathan Wild.

After having procured Blueskin's commitment to Newgate he became very busy indeed.

The reader may be sure that the capture of Blueskin happening so unexpectedly as it did, interfered materially with the precise course of action which he had chalked out.

He wished the trial and execution of Blueskin to take place as speedily as possible, and this necessitated a great deal of extra trouble upon his part.

The frequent visits to Jack Sheppard which he had so firmly made up his mind to pay became absolutely impossible, and this is the reason Jack saw so little of him during the latter part of his imprisonment, though it is not the reason why, in the end, he failed to pay any visits at all.

It was first of all necessary to have a case against Blueskin, and one, too, that would not fail.

Now this was not the easiest matter in the world.

To find out prosecutors, and get together witnesses, in order to complete a case is a matter of time, and Jonathan soon discovered that he must either allow Blueskin's trial to stand over until next sessions, or else by the adoption of some clever expedient get him disposed of at once.

As the former would disarrange, in a great measure, the scheme which he had formed, Jonathan resolved upon the latter.

Having pondered over this for some little time, the thief-taker fancied he could not do better than put into practice a little scheme which hitherto had never failed to accomplish the end desired.

It was to get up, or, rather, fabricate some fictitious charge against the prisoner of so simple and clear a character, as to make conviction certain.

To do this, it would be necessary to employ a certain lawyer, who always managed these sort of cases in a manner highly satisfactory to Jonathan Wild.

Having given him the particulars, Jonathan next proceeded to get the services of two persons: one to swear to having had certain articles taken from him by the prisoner, and the other to corroborate what he said.

This Jonathan managed, and drilled all the particulars into them.

As the facts of the case were exceedingly simple, he did not very much dread failure.

He knew well enough the impolicy of having an intricate case, in which the witnesses would get confused.

Then Jonathan reserved a little share in the business for himself.

Such was the plot he had manufactured against our old friend Blueskin; and when we say that he had made it complete in every respect, the reader will be able to understand that the exertions he had made to bring about such a state of things were decidedly of a superhuman character.

It took up the whole of his time, that is certain.

On Thursday Jonathan had everything ready.

He had seen Mr. Noakes, and obtained from that amiable functionary a most solemn promise that while he was unavoidably occupied with Blueskin's case he would be unremitting in his attentions to Jack Sheppard.

With the promise thus obtained the thief-taker was forced to rest content.

As to how faithfully Mr. Noakes had performed it let the reader judge by what we have related.

All this time Blueskin had remained in his cell a prey to the deepest possible dejection.

How it had come upon him he scarcely knew.

Most likely it was the conviction which, strive as he would, he could not keep from pressing on his mind, that it was useless to struggle—that Jonathan would indubitably triumph.

What was more hopeless than the prospect before him.

He was a prisoner, heavily ironed, and guarded with treble care.

Jack Sheppard was in the same predicament, and beyond all doubt Edgworth Bess was a prisoner in Wild's house.

There was no direction, look where he would, in which he could secure a ray of comfort or consolation.

And so, as we have said, a feeling of deep dejection took hold of him, and he strove in vain against its influence.

He knew not the precise nature of the charge that was to be preferred against him.

All that he had been able to learn was that it was a charge of highway robbery.

All particulars were denied him.

At length Friday morning came.

The turnkeys found him in just the same position.

It had been arranged that Blueskin's trial should take place the first thing, and so immediately after breakfast the blacksmith entered the cell to knock off his fetters.

The prisoners were never taken to the dock in irons.

Blueskin stood still and quiet enough while the blacksmith performed his duty.

But he felt rather better when he was freed from these unpleasant incumbrances.

In case the reader may fall into any error, we here venture to remind him that the events which we are now recording took place on the morning preceding the night upon which Jack Sheppard effected his escape.

Mr. Noakes, the Governor, made his appearance in Blueskin's cell just as the blacksmith was knocking out the last rivet.

"Hold him fast!" he said, addressing himself to the turnkeys. "He's a desperate character, but, thank goodness, the case against him is so clear and straightforward that he is sure not to escape his just fate. Tyburn Tree groans for him, that it does!"

In obedience to the command of their superior, the turnkeys tightened their grasp upon Blueskin's collar.

He, however, made no resistance, and altogether disdained to take the slightest notice of the Governor's remarks.

This exasperated Mr. Noakes, who would have been better pleased if he could have succeeded in aggravating him.

"Bring him along!—bring him along!" he said presently to the turnkeys. "It will soon be all over with him. Come along!"

"The Court's hardly seated, sir."

"Never mind; we'll take him to the outer chamber, and have him there in readiness. Look after him!"

The Governor stood aside, and the turnkeys led Blueskin passively and unresisting out of his cell.

Mr. Noakes followed, with a pompous step.

It was perfectly true that the Judge had not yet taken his seat upon the bench, but, nevertheless, Mr. Noakes thought he would have Blueskin at hand in good time.

With his head bowed down, our old friend suffered himself to be led towards his destination.

He heeded not the stone passage through which they passed; he took not the slightest notice of their route.

When they paused, then, he raised his head and looked about him.

He found he was standing in a small stone chamber, to all appearance quite as strong as the cell from which he had just been brought.

As the turnkeys, too, numbered seven or eight, he was tolerably secure.

The door through which they had passed to enter this place they closed after them, and securely fastened.

On the other side there was another door, very massive, and of great strength.

Beyond there was a flight of steps, which led up into the dock.

There was a stone bench along one side of this chamber, and on this Blueskin was permitted to sit down.

A turnkey placed himself on either side of him.

Blueskin, having taken a glance round, subsided into his former attitude, and the turnkeys, observing this, relaxed their vigilance somewhat.

Some minutes would elapse before business commenced, and so they chatted idly to each other.

The turnkey who sat on Blueskin's right hand took out a clasp-knife—truly a formidable weapon—and some bread and cheese, which he set about eating with great relish.

He was thus engaged when Jonathan Wild entered the chamber.

His countenance was contracted into a derisive smile, and folding his arms, he stood for a moment or two looking at the prisoner, exulting over his downcast appearance.

But Blueskin remained unmoved.

To speak the truth, Wild was not a little surprised at the prisoner's dejection.

He could scarcely account for it.

"What Blue, old boy," he cried, in a mocking tone of voice—"are you so down in the mouth? I thought you would die game, but you don't look much like it now!"

Blueskin took no more notice of Wild's words than if he had never spoken them.

Jonathan came nearer.

"Ha, ha, my friend! do you recollect the pleasant little bit of conversation we had not very long ago? If you do, perhaps you will remember a certain offer that I made to you. I told you what the consequences would be, didn't I?"

Wild touched him on the shoulder as he spoke.

Blueskin looked up savagely.

"You had best keep your hands off!" he said.

"What! Have you found your tongue at last? Ha, ha! well done! Don't you wish you had said yes, when you had the chance? I know you do! But it's too late now, Blue—it's too late! The whole affair is cut and dried, and has gone so far as to be beyond my control—even mine! I could not call you back, or keep your head out of the halter, if I was even so minded. But you shall swing! I'm going to be a witness against you, Blue—a principal witness, for I shall swear to your identity. They won't shake my evidence by cross-examination, I know—I am too old a hand at that sort of thing!"

Ere this, the reader must have noticed that Jonathan Wild took an insane delight in thus tormenting and teasing any of his prisoners.

It delighted him to work them up to an ungovernable pitch of fury, and then watch their impotent rage.

He could tell by the flashing glances that came from Blueskin's eyes that he was getting enraged, and he hastened to increase the effect he had already produced.

"I shall get up into the witness-box," said Wild. "Ha, ha!—what fun! When I am asked whether I know you, I shall say, 'My lord, I know this man very well. He was formerly a police-officer, and now——'"

"You lie!" exclaimed Blueskin, in a voice of thunder—"you lie! You will not say a word this day if I can prevent you."

While he spoke these words, Blueskin, to the surprise and consternation of all present, started to his feet before anyone had the least idea of what he was about to do.

His eye was on the open clasp knife which the turnkey who sat next to him held in his hand, and, pouncing upon it like a hawk upon its prey, he wrested it from the man's grasp with lightning-like rapidity.

Then bounding forward, he seized Jonathan by the throat, and bore him backwards to the ground.

Then he inflicted a terrible wound in the thief-taker's neck, from which the blood spurted out in incredible quantities.

So suddenly was all this performed, that a clock could not have ticked thrice while Blueskin sprang to his feet, seized the knife, and stabbed his foe with it.

He would have repeated his blow—indeed, the weapon was in the very act of descending when his arm was arrested by the turnkeys, who by this time had recovered from the state of utter amazement and confusion into which they had been thrown.

By their united strength they succeeded in dragging

Blueskin away from Jonathan Wild, who fell heavily at full length upon the floor.

The knife was wrested from Blueskin's grasp, and his arms held tightly by four turnkeys, while the remainder, together with the Governor, stooped over the prostrate form of the thief-taker, and endeavoured to ascertain the extent of the hurts he had received.

CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

IT SEEMS AFTER ALL AS THOUGH JONATHAN WILD IS DESTINED TO DIE BY THE HANGMAN'S ROPE.

THERE was no trouble to hold Blueskin.

Having, as he thought, accomplished his purpose, he relapsed into his former apathetic state, except that he watched with the keenest interest all that took place with respect to Jonathan Wild.

It was mere impulse which had prompted Blueskin to commit this deed.

He had no thought of it the moment before, but stung to the quick by the taunts to which the thief-taker had given utterance, he felt a desire to be revenged.

The thought of the knife flashed across his mind, and without a moment's further thought—without the least reflection—he darted forward.

Jonathan Wild himself was, for once in his life, completely taken at unawares.

An attack of this character from Blueskin was about the last thing Wild expected.

All had been done so quickly from first to last, that the spectators of it could scarcely bring themselves to believe in the reality of the occurrence.

Some very dismal groans, however, came from Wild's lips, and when the men raised him a little, he looked very ghastly and bad indeed.

He rolled his hideous eyes slowly and painfully around until they rested upon Blueskin's countenance.

Then his features became convulsed with rage, as he gasped faintly:

"Hold him—hold him! Do not let him escape!"

"Run for a doctor in a moment!" cried Mr. Noakes.

A turnkey departed upon this errand.

Those who held Blueskin cried:

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Wild! We have got him safe."

Jonathan's face expanded into a grim sort of smile.

"I have paid you at last," said Blueskin, in a voice that rung and echoed through the stone chamber—"I have paid you at last, and now I am content. You will bear false witness against me, will you? I shall like to hear you."

Jonathan Wild strove to speak.

But the effort was an unsuccessful one.

The blood continued to gush from his throat, and each moment he grew perceptibly weaker.

His head fell back, as the muscles in his neck refused to support its weight.

His eyes glared, and he showed every symptom of approaching death.

Blueskin smiled, and was satisfied.

About his own fate he had grown quite careless, and the thought that he had destroyed his bitter foe in the very hour of his triumph and success sent a thrill of pleasure through his frame.

Some anxious moments passed.

No one seemed to know exactly what to do; but all watched with great eagerness and impatience for the appearance of the doctor.

Blueskin looked on in grim silence, and contemplated the thief-taker with great satisfaction.

The thought that he could see his life-blood so rapidly ebbing from him overjoyed him.

Presently, the sound of steps approaching the stone chamber could be heard, and then several persons entered with great haste and confusion.

The doctor who arrived was no other than our old friend the apothecary, Mr. Snoxall.

He had been fetched because, as his shop was situated at the corner of Skinner Street and the Old Bailey, he was the nearest at hand.

He exhibited great concern when he saw the state of his patient, and called for warm water and sponge.

While these were being procured, he stooped down, and proceeded to remove Wild's neckcloth.

This was a very voluminous affair, and was wound round his neck several times.

The removal of this had the effect of causing the blood to flow much faster.

The sponge and water having now arrived, the apothecary proceeded to wash the wound.

As soon as he had completed this operation, a very ugly-looking gash was disclosed.

This he strapped up in a very skilful manner with some plaster which he took from his pocket.

Everyone of his actions was closely watched by those present, and having done so far, he set about reviving Jonathan by holding a smelling-bottle to his nose.

After about three inhalations, the thief-taker sneezed, and re-opened his eyes.

At first he was unconscious of what had just taken place.

His brain wandered.

But he soon came to his senses.

He caught hold of Mr. Snoxall by the skirt of his coat, and said:

"I have been hurt—stabbed!"

"You have, Mr. Wild."

"Speak! Tell me at once, and tell me the truth, on your life. Is the wound a mortal one?"

"I don't think it will prove so, Mr. Wild, if you are very careful. You have truly an iron constitution."

These words seemed to have a wonderful effect in recovering the thief-taker.

He uttered a loud, howling shriek, and then in a calmer voice, he said:

"Not mortal—you are sure not mortal?"

"It is an ugly affair, Mr. Wild, I can assure you. You have need to be thankful that you happened to have such a thick neckcloth on."

"Why?"

"Because you unquestionably owe your life to that simple circumstance. Had not your neckcloth been such a thickness you would have found yourself with your head half off!"

"Thanks—thanks! You shall be well paid for this!"

Then, turning to Blueskin, the thief-taker continued:

"Ha, ha! Clever as you are, I shall do for you yet—ha, ha!"

Mr. Snoxall touched the thief-taker on the arm imploringly:

"Mr. Wild—oh, Mr. Wild!" he said, "listen—pray do listen! I cannot be answerable for the injury you have received without you keep yourself perfectly quiet! The worst results may follow any undue excitement!"

"Stuff—fudge!" said Jonathan. "I have got a part to perform to-day, and I will not flinch! No, villain! I will have the sentence pronounced! I will do my share towards procuring your death! I—I—"

Jonathan gasped for breath, and made two or three abortive efforts to speak, until at length his head fell back and he relapsed into insensibility.

"It is, perhaps, better so!" said Mr. Snoxall. "I will have him conveyed away while in this state, and the only chance I shall have of doing any good with him will be by keeping him asleep! Will you, Mr. Noakes, allow some of your men to carry him to his house?"

The Governor of Newgate gave the requisite directions, and then four turnkeys took the body of Jonathan Wild and carried it out of the chamber.

Blueskin fixed his eyes upon him up to the last moment.

He experienced a bitter pang when he found that Wild was still alive and that there was some prospect of his recovery.

When they had gone Mr. Noakes turned towards him as he said:

"So, villain, you are balked of your designs! When was a murder committed within the walls of Newgate before?"

"I wish with all my heart it had been a murder!" said Blueskin, "if you call the slaying of a noxious criminal like Jonathan Wild murder! But I was a fool to make the attempt!"

"Why did you do so, then? You will find it will tell against you at your trial!"

"I tried thoughtlessly! I might have known that I should fail! No knife will ever drink Jonathan Wild's blood! He is destined to take his last look of this world at Tyburn!"

"It would be more sensible if I was to prophecy the same thing of you!" retorted Mr. Noakes. "If every man deserved to die an ignominious death there you do, and you will, too, before many days pass over your head!"

"We shall see about that!" said Blueskin.

"Do not stop dallying any longer here!" continued the Governor. "Lead him on and place him in the dock! I will myself make the judge acquainted with what has just taken place!"

The four turnkeys now led Blueskin up the flight of stone steps we have mentioned.

They terminated in one corner of the dock where the prisoners stand.

In another moment Blueskin found himself standing in this place under the charge of a police-officer.

The turnkeys fell back into the rear.

Mr. Noakes followed the little party up the steps and took his seat in the little box-like place at the side of the dock, which was specially constructed for his use on such occasions.

He sat down in a moment and commenced writing at a furious rate upon a sheet of paper.

Blueskin paid no attention to him, but glanced calmly round the court.

The preliminary business of the day had not yet been disposed of.

The Judge was seated in his chair busily occupied in reading the newspaper.

The barristers were chatting with each other and laughing, or else looking over the briefs and taking notes.

From these Blueskin's eyes roamed over the body of the court, and he gave a passing glance at those persons who were seated in the gallery just above his head.

The crier was administering the oath to the jurymen, and his cracked and jangling voice sounded high above the other minor sounds which filled the court.

This ceremony was at length concluded and order called.

In another moment silence reigned throughout the building.

The only sound audible was the squeaking of Mr. Noakes's quill pen.

The Governor was writing away for his life.

Order was again called, and the business of the day began.

The clerk of the arraigns, a young, florid, puppyish young man, rose from his seat in an affected manner.

He held several parchments in his left hand, which were fastened together at one corner.

Having rummaged them over, he commenced reading the indictment.

But such a gabbling noise was surely never before heard.

Blueskin strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, for he was eager to know all the particulars he possibly could about the charge preferred against him.

Very soon, however, he gave up the attempt in despair.

When he looked about him he found that no one was paying the least attention to what was being read.

The Judge still continued the perusal of his newspaper.

The barristers continued to talk and laugh, though in an under-tone.

As a last hope Blueskin glanced at the jury.

But they were no exception to the rule.

To be sure they all tried to look very serious and sagacious, but failed most signally in both.

One had his eyes fixed upon the reflecting mirror above his head, another was playing with a pen, and so on.

All were intent upon something else, and not the business in hand.

Blueskin was roused from this survey by the hearing the clerk of the arraigns say, in a louder and more audible tone of voice:

"Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty or not guilty to the charge now brought before you?"

"Not guilty!" said Blueskin, in a clear, firm voice.

A slight bustle followed, and then a counsel, who had been entrusted with the prosecution, rose to his feet.

He was about to speak, when Mr. Noakes, the Governor, rose and said:

"My lord, I am sure you will pardon me for interrupting, but I have here a paper relative to the prisoner,

which your lordship will please peruse before going further with the case!"

The Judge hesitated, and asked:

"What is the nature of the communication?"

"It is here in writing, my lord, and concerns some events that took place in Newgate a little while ago?"

"Concerning the prisoner?"

"Yes, your lordship!"

"Pass me the paper, then, I will read it."

An usher of the court now came forward, and taking the folded paper from Mr. Noakes, carried it to the judge on the bench.

His lordship took the paper, opened it, and gave quite a theatrical kind of start when his eye caught the first words.

The dominant curiosity of all the persons in court was keenly aroused by this letter.

Every one wondered what could be the nature of the contents of it, while they watched the countenance of the judge with all-absorbing interest.

His lordship read the document steadily through to the end, and then, looking up, he addressed Mr. Noakes, saying:

"Are you sure there is no mistake here? Will you swear to this?"

"Certainly, my lord!" returned the Governor, readily. "A dozen persons witnessed the transaction!"

"Enough. Gentlemen of the jury, I do not wish to pre-judge this case or excite any detrimental prejudice against the prisoner at the bar! Nevertheless, I must make you acquainted with the subject matter of this communication which I have just received from Mr. Noakes, the Governor!"

A dead silence followed.

The judge rustled the paper in an imposing manner, held it up to the light, and then, in rather a low tone of voice, he spoke as follows:—

CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

BLUESKIN TAKES HIS TRIAL AT THE BAR OF THE OLD BAILEY.

"GENTLEMEN of the Jury,

"This document states that this morning the prisoner at the bar was brought from his cell to the ante-chamber beneath the dock, so as to be in readiness when he was called. It seems he had to wait here some few minutes, during which space of time Mr. Jonathan Wild, very unfortunately for himself, happened to enter. Without suspecting any harm, it seems he incautiously approached the prisoner, who, finding Mr. Wild within his reach, with great suddenness started to his feet, wrenched a knife from one of the turnkeys, and with this weapon stabbed Mr. Wild furiously and dangerously in the throat!"

In modern language, this intelligence produced a great sensation in the court.

As if with one consent, every face in the court was turned to Blueskin's.

The judge went on:

"From the determined and desperate manner in which the attack was made, Mr. Noakes expresses his belief that nothing less than the death of Mr. Wild was the object of the prisoner at the bar. Luckily, however, he was foiled in this design. The wound received by Mr. Wild has been pronounced not mortal, but still a very dangerous one. In order to recover he will have to take extreme care, and to receive the best of medical attention.

"The reason the prisoner failed may be attributed to two causes—first, the promptitude with which he was seized and overpowered by the turnkeys; and second, the fact of Mr. Wild having worn a very thick neckcloth, which obstructed the progress of the knife."

The judge ceased, and looked at the jury-box.

"Such, gentlemen of the jury," he said, "is the nature of the communication just received, which I hand over to you in order that you may peruse it for yourselves, and ascertain the truth of it."

The paper was then passed to the foreman of the jury, who, having looked at it, circulated it among his companions.

As may naturally be supposed the results of this was that a very unfavourable impression with respect to Blueskin took possession of the jurymen and all the spectators in the court, although there were very few who really, and truly speaking, felt any great amount of sympathy for Jonathan Wild.

Mr. Noakes's communication having been duly handed round by the jurymen, and read by those in possession of so useful an accomplishment, was handed back to the judge, and then the interrupted proceedings resumed their usual course.

If anything, an extra interest was now felt in all that concerned the prisoner at the bar in the remotest degree.

The counsel for the prosecution, who had resumed his seat, now rose again, and having adjusted his black gown to his satisfaction, and flourished his papers formidably, spoke as follows:

In the intense silence of the court, every word he uttered could be heard with painful distinctness.

"My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury,

"It will be proved to you in evidence that the prisoner at the bar, by name Joseph Blake, but better known by the nickname of Blueskin, is one of the most daring and desperate of depredators that the present or any other age has had the ill-fortune to produce.

"I confess, gentlemen of the jury, that it was at first my intention to have expiated at some length upon the numerous offences of the prisoner.

"It was my intention to describe the man in his true and proper colours, but I abandon that intention.

"There is no longer any need for me to take up your time, gentlemen of the jury, with a recapitulation of the deeds committed during his long career.

"The little incident which has just come under your notice does away in a moment with the necessity for anything of the kind.

"The man's disposition and character are fully revealed to you in all their black enormity by this single act.

"The circumstance must be fresh in your memories.

"Mr. Jonathan Wild, who has rendered the Government and the country at large inestimable service in the apprehension of criminals of the deep-dyed desperate class, to whose indefatigable exertions and dauntless conduct the presence of the prisoner at the bar is this day due—I say, this public servant approaching him incautiously was seriously wounded.

"Gentlemen of the jury, what would not that man do who just upon the threshold of taking his trial before you upon a charge affecting his life if proved against him—I say, gentlemen of the jury, what would such a man do who, under these circumstances, attempted to commit a brutal murder.

"Such a man would be capable of anything, and I no longer need dwell upon his character.

"What I have already advanced will be quite sufficient.

"In connection with this attempted murder, gentlemen of the jury, I have, however, something to say.

"At present you only possess the bare knowledge of what the prisoner did; but I can supply you with the motive for his conduct, and when I have done so you will no longer wonder at his having made so cowardly an attack upon the life of Mr. Jonathan Wild.

"The motive is this:

"Mr. Wild was to have appeared before you to-day, gentlemen of the jury, as an important witness in behalf of the prosecution.

"The prisoner fearing the result of the disclosure of certain facts, resolved to prevent Mr. Wild from appearing before you, and there is no doubt that he has succeeded so far in accomplishing his villainous purpose.

"We have been informed, gentlemen of the jury, by Mr. Noakes, the worthy Governor of Newgate, that Mr. Wild is in a precarious condition, and that in order to recover he will have to take the greatest care, and be compelled to have the best medical advice and assistance.

"Under these circumstances, then, he cannot, of course, present himself before you. I might, therefore, ask for the postponement of this trial until the next session upon the ground that an important witness is unable to attend.

"But I shall make no such application, gentlemen.

"I should be sorry to see the prisoner accomplish his purpose. No! We will supply the place of Mr. Wild.



THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH DISENCUMBERS JACK SHEPPARD OF HIS FETTERS.

"Luckily the evidence against the prisoner is singularly lucid and simple.

"The facts will be simply placed before you and amply borne out by the evidence adduced. One point upon which Mr. Wild's testimony would have been important was the positive identification of the prisoner, but I am instructed to state that there are persons in court who can give this important evidence. In the second place, Mr. Wild would have given an account of all the antecedent proceedings of the prisoner. This, however, must be dispensed with altogether, or supplied in the best manner possible.

"My immediate duty, gentlemen of the jury, after making these introductory remarks, is to give an account of the circumstances of the charge preferred against the prisoner.

"I shall be able to do this in a few words.

"On the 7th day of October last, Mr. Daniel Higgins, a No. 78.—BLUESKIN.

highly-respectable tradesman and citizen of London, in company with a friend, hired a vehicle, and went down as far as Barnet.

"From this place they returned just about sunset the same evening. Mr. Higgins was driving; his friend sat by his side.

"While approaching Finchley, and while it was yet twilight, they were startled by a man who rode out suddenly into the road.

"He held a double-barrelled pistol in his hand, and, aiming this at Mr. Higgins and his friend as they sat in the vehicle, swore with an oath that if they did not pull up that instant he would blow their brains out.

"Influenced by this horrible menace, Mr. Higgins drew the rein. The horseman then, still holding a pistol threateningly at them, demanded the money and whatever valuables they had about them.

"Being unarmed and unable to resist, Mr. Higgins and

his friend complied with the highwayman's demands, and surrendered to him every article of value that they had about them.

"The articles consisted of a large silver watch belonging to Mr. Higgins, and some money in coin.

"Having thus succeeded in his purpose, the highwayman rode off, having put the travellers in grievous bodily fear for their lives.

"Gentlemen of the jury—I have said that it was twilight when this took place. Objects not far away could be clearly and plainly distinguished.

"Consequently, Mr. Higgins and his friend—both of whom will presently be called before you—had an opportunity of closely observing the countenance of the man who despoiled them of their property, for, while committing the robbery, he came quite close up to them in a very daring manner.

"That Mr. Higgins and his friend should carefully notice the personal appearance of the highwayman is nothing but natural—any of you, gentlemen of the jury, would have done just the same thing.

"Mr. Higgins and his friend, then, observed their antagonist attentively, and they will be prepared to come forward and swear positively to his identity.

"Moreover, when the prisoner at the bar was captured and brought to Newgate, he was, in accordance with the regulations of the prison, thoroughly searched by experienced officers.

"Among the various articles in this manner brought to light, was a large silver watch, of rather peculiar workmanship.

"That watch, gentlemen of the jury, will be produced by the police officer who found it on the prisoner.

"This will complete the case.

"A respectable citizen of London is robbed by a highwayman.

"A silver watch and other articles were taken from him.

"The watch to be presently produced, which you understand was found upon the person of the prisoner, Mr. Daniel Higgins will swear was his property.

"He will also swear that the prisoner at the bar is the individual who committed the robbery on the night in question, and the friend who sat with him in the conveyance that had been hired will support this portion of his testimony.

"Such, then, gentlemen of the jury, is the case for the prosecution, and I shall now proceed without further delay to call the witnesses before you."

The counsel for the prosecution resumed his seat, and having shuffled his papers about, whispered rapidly to a sickly-looking young man who sat next to him.

There was now a slight lull in the proceedings, and people looked about them a little, and hinted their opinion of the case.

As for Blueskin, he stood like one in a dream.

He could scarcely bring himself to believe in the reality of the events which were taking place around him, and yet the circumstantial coherence of the narrative which came so glibly from the lips of the counsel for the prosecution staggered him.

The reader need not be told that Blueskin did not commit the offence with which he was thus charged.

He knew nothing at all about it.

At first he had listened in doubt whether he had really committed a robbery upon the person of Mr. Daniel Higgins; but when the counsel proceeded to give the particulars, he had no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that no such deed was ever perpetrated by him.

Never in the whole course of his career had he committed a robbery on the highway, the details of which corresponded in the least degree with those which had been just mentioned.

Under these circumstances, it is not to be surprised at that Blueskin felt very much bewildered, and was in doubt as to what he should say.

His irresolution was, however, quickly put an end to, and his whole attention absorbed by what was going on before him.

He felt the same curious interest which people feel when they see a play, the denouement of which is unknown to them.

To Blueskin, all the incidents were as fresh as they are to the reader.

The sickly-faced young man, to whom we referred a little while back, and who sat next to the counsel for the prosecution, having got his documents in readiness, now rose to his feet, and said:

"Call Mr. Daniel Higgins!"

This done, he sat down again.

This was the junior counsel, whose duty it was to examine the witnesses.

The whispering between him and his superior went on again with redoubled vigour.

In the meanwhile, the crier of the court, in a high, nasal tone of voice, repeated the name of the witness.

There was a bit of a stir in the recess between the Governor's seat at the side of the dock and the jury box, and then someone could be seen pushing his way through the people who obstructed his progress.

"This way, if you please, sir!" said the crier. "The Court is waiting for you."

Blueskin looked along at this person, but he was not able to see him with any degree of distinctness until he stood up in the witness box.

This elevated position he gained in the course of another moment, and the crier having put the bar across, proceeded to administer the oath.

While this little ceremony was gone through, Blueskin was enabled to have a good look at the individual who answered to the name of Mr. Daniel Higgins.

To the best of his belief, the prisoner had never seen him before until that moment.

He was a little man, apparently about sixty years of age.

He was very thin.

His cheeks were hollow, and his hands as fleshless as those of a skeleton, while all his garments hung loosely about him.

He was attired in a suit of dark grey cloth, which was decidedly the worse for wear.

His rusty black hat he had placed after some hesitation upon the table near him.

He was quite bald.

All the hair he had on his head being like a ragged fringe about half an inch in depth, which extended from one ear to the other.

But the bald part of his head had a dirty unwashed look, which was very disagreeable to the beholder.

He was bent into a perpetual bow, and seemed as though he would cringe to everybody, and allow them even to walk over his body, if they thought fit to do so.

CHAPTER CCLXXX.

BLUESKIN LISTENS WITH GREAT INTEREST TO THE DETAILS OF THE CHARGE PREPARED AGAINST HIM.

SUCH is a feeble and faint description of the personal appearance of Mr. Daniel Higgins.

We have described him all but his eyes, and these were such a peculiar feature that they deserve special notice.

It was but rarely that they could be seen, owing to his habit of holding down his head.

When he addressed anyone, or when he was spoken to, he would glance furtively from under his shaggy brows.

All that could then be seen of his eyes were two twinkling, glistening stars, which seemed to possess a keenness of vision equal to those of a hawk.

While he took the oath he fixed his eyes steadfastly upon the book, and in conclusion kissed it with rather a "clamorous smack."

Then he gave one of his furtive, stealthy glances round the court.

But in that glance he took in everything.

Blueskin was conscious for an instant that the strange being was looking at him, and then his eyes were directed elsewhere.

The whole time occupied by this stealthy glance was very brief indeed, and when he had done, he stood in an attitude of great affected humbleness and deference.

He rubbed one hand slowly over the other in a manner disagreeable in the extreme with the fidgety notion which Hood describes as

"Washing his hands with invisible soap,
In imperceptible water."

The junior counsel was now upon his legs again.

Making a pretence of referring to his papers, he turned to the witness, and said:

"What is your name, if you please?"

The witness's lips moved, but no audible sound came from them.

"Speak up, if you please. We can't hear you? What's your name?"

"Daniel Higgins, sir."

"Oh, Daniel Higgins!" repeated the counsel. "And where do you reside, Mr. Daniel Higgins?"

"Little Britain, sir."

"Where?" said the judge, in an imposing voice, as he stopped in the middle of writing his notes.

"In Little Britain, my lord," said the junior counsel. "It's a narrow street that turns, I believe, out of St. Martin's-le-Grand, and leads into Smithfield. Is that right?" added the counsel, inquiringly, as he turned to the witness.

"Yes, sir; that is right."

The judge wrote it down in his notes.

"What is the nature of the business you carry on there, Mr. Higgins?"

"I keeps a coffee-shop, sir."

"Oh—indeed! Well, do you happen to recollect the 7th day of October last?"

"Yes, sir."

"You do recollect it?"

"I do."

"What happened then on that day for you to remember it so particularly?"

"I went for a ride to Barnet in a horse and trap."

"Did you go alone?"

"No, sir."

"Who went with you?"

"A friend of mine."

"What is his name?"

"Bob Siggers."

"Is he in attendance?"

"Yes, sir, he's a-waiting."

"Very well, then, that will do. On the 7th day of October last you say you went to Barnet in a horse and trap, and that a friend of yours, by name Mr. Siggers, accompanied you?"

"That's it, sir."

"Very well. Did anything particular occur to you on the way to Barnet?"

"No, sir. We started about eight o'clock in the morning, and got there between ten and eleven."

"Very good. Then will you have the kindness to tell his lordship and the gentlemen of the jury what happened to you on your way home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, go on. What time was it when you left Barnet on your way back to London?"

"About half-past four in the afternoon."

"About half-past four?"

"Yes, sir. I couldn't say the time exactly, but it was just about sunset."

"Very well. And Mr. Siggers returned with you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, he did."

"Very well, then. What happened to you after you left Barnet?"

"Well, sir, I was a-driving along, thinking of nothing in particular, when all of a sudden I saw a man on horseback in the road. I how he got there I don't know; he seemed to come all at once."

"Go on, if you please."

"Well, sir, I can assure you it gave me a bit of a turn to see him so sudden, and then I saw that he had a pistol in his hand."

"Who had a pistol in his hand?" asked the judge.

"The man on horseback in the road, my lord."

"How came you to see it?"

"Why, my lord, it was only like twilight, and you could see about you pretty well. But not only that, the man pointed the pistol at me, and came quite close up to the cart, and swore with an oath that if I did not pull up he would blow my brains out."

"And what did you do?"

"I pulled up, in course, for I thought he would be as good as his word."

"What then?"

"When the cart had stopped, he came quite close up to us, and still pointing the pistol at me and my friend, Bob Siggers, told us to hand over all the money and valuables we had about us, or he would blow our brains out."

"You will swear he said he would blow your brains out?"

"Yes, my lord."

There was a pause, during which the judge occupied himself in making this important memorandum.

When he had done, he looked up as a signal to the prisoner's counsel that he was ready for him to proceed.

"Well, Mr. Higgins, what did you do when you were threatened in so dreadful a manner?"

"Why, sir, I gave him all I had."

"And your friend?"

"He did the same, sir."

"Well, and what then?"

"When he had taken all that we had got about us, the highwayman rode off, and suffered us to proceed."

"And did you meet with any further interruption on your way home?"

"No, sir."

"That will do. Now, the next thing I want you to tell us is, what articles you gave to the highwayman."

"I gave him some money."

"In coin or notes?"

"In coin."

"Then that I suppose you cannot identify?"

"I cannot, sir."

"What else did he take from you—or rather, what else did he compel you to give him?"

The junior counsel smiled at what he thought an admirable stroke of wit.

"I gave him a large silver watch."

"Was that your own property?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had it been long in your possession?"

"Yes, a good while, sir. It was my father's before it was mine."

"Oh, indeed! then you must be perfectly familiar with the watch?"

"Quite so, sir."

"And this you say the highwayman took, and rode away with?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure you would know the watch if you were to see it again?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the senior counsel, "I have stated that a watch was found upon the person of the prisoner at the time of his apprehension. I will now call the officer before you who found the article I have mentioned, and who will produce it to the Court."

The counsel sat down, and his junior said:

"Call George Grimmett!"

A police officer answering to this name now made his appearance, carrying a bundle of some kind in one hand.

Mr. Daniel Higgins was desired to stand down for a moment, so as to give place to this new witness, though the crier signified to him that he was not yet done with.

The police officer was then sworn, and having answered to his name, proceeded to untie the bundle.

Upon this Blueskin fixed his eyes with very great attention.

He was very anxious and curious to know what the bundle contained.

The junior counsel interrupted the police officer in what he was about by saying:

"Now, George Grimmett, attend to me, if you please."

The officer turned round in a moment, and, puffing out his cheeks, looked attentively at Blueskin.

He had been a witness many a time, and knew the exact routine.

"Be good enough to look at the prisoner at the bar."

"I is a-looking at him, sir!"

"Did you take him into custody?"

"Well, not exactly, sir."

"What do you mean by not exactly?"

"Mr. Wild took him prisoner, sir."

"Oh! ah! It is so in my notes. But you were present when the prisoner was brought into the lobby of Newgate, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, then. Be good enough to look at the

prisoner at the bar again, and then tell me whether he is the same person that Mr. Wild brought in as a prisoner."

"It is the same, sir," said the police officer, after looking at Blueskin again.

"That will do. Did Mr. Wild say who he was?"

"Yes, sir, he said his name was Blueskin."

"That is not his real name?"

"No, sir, that is his alye-as, sir."

"His real name is Joseph Blake, is it not?"

"I believe it is, sir."

"Do you know the prisoner?"

"Oh yes, sir, I have seen him hundreds of times! He was formerly in the employ of Jonathan Wild."

"Then you can swear to his identity?"

"Certainly, sir, I can."

"That is enough. When he was brought into the lobby, what did you do?"

"Searched him, sir."

"What did you find?"

"These articles, sir," said the police officer, going to his bundle again.

A watch was disclosed, and several other insignificant articles, and a considerable sum in money.

Blueskin recognised all as belonging to him except the watch.

The officer who stood in the witness-box was the one who had searched him.

Blueskin had even had a watch taken from him, but it was not the same one that lay on the top of the other things in the bundle.

It had been a little of Jonathan Wild's cleverness which had brought about the substitution.

The junior counsel continued his examination of George Grimmett.

"Did you find a watch upon the person of the prisoner?"

"I did, sir."

"Have you it there?"

"I have, sir."

"Produce it, then."

The officer held up a watch by the chain that was attached to it.

The watch was of silver, and the size of it was certainly not any larger than a turnip.

Most persons in court felt their visages relax into a smile when they beheld it.

"Is that the watch you found upon the person of the prisoner?"

"It is, sir."

"That will do, then," said the junior counsel. "You swear that the prisoner at the bar is Joseph Blake, better known as Blueskin, and that he is the person from whom you took the watch you hold in your hand?"

The officer nodded his head, and said:

"I do sir."

"Then you can stand down."

"Wait a moment!" said the judge, biting the feather-end of his quill pen. "Who appears for the defence—on behalf of the prisoner?"

A silence followed.

The clerk of the arraigns then rose from his seat just underneath the judge's desk, and, turning round, said:

"I believe the prisoner is undefended, my lord."

"Indeed! that ought to have been mentioned before," then turning to Blueskin, he added: "Prisoner at the bar, have you employed anyone to defend you?"

"I have not, my lord," replied Blueskin, "I had not the means of doing so."

"Hum! ha!" said the judge, looking at the barristers seated round the table. "Perhaps one of my learned friends would be kind enough to watch the case for the prisoner?"

An irresolute pause followed, and then a young man rose and said:

"I will undertake that duty, my lord."

This was merely a matter of form, and the barrister sat down again.

"Prisoner at the bar," continued the judge, "have you anything to say to this witness?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What is it?"

"The watch which he says was found upon me I most solemnly swear was never in my possession!"

"But he swears he took it from you in the lobby when he searched you. He stands there on his oath."

"Then he perjures himself, my lord!"

"Have you anything further to say to him?"

"No more than that, my lord."

The judge made a sign with his pen to the officer, who left the witness-box with all speed.

"Now, Mr. Higgins," said the junior counsel, "we will trouble you to stand up again, if you please."

In the same trembling, cringing manner as before, Mr. Higgins got up into the witness-box.

As soon as he was instated there, the junior counsel continued:

"Now, Mr. Daniel Higgins, be kind enough to look at that watch which you see on the table beside you."

The witness did as he was bid, and looked at the watch carefully.

"Do you recognise it?" asked the counsel.

"I do, sir—it is mine."

"You swear that?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Very well! Now tell me—will you swear that that is the watch which you surrendered to the prisoner when he stopped you on the high-road, on your way back from Finchley, on the 7th day of October last?"

"I will, sir."

"The money, you say, you could not swear to?"

"I could not."

"Have you any doubt as to the identity of the prisoner at the bar? Look at him, and tell me whether he is the man who stopped you on the Finchley road on the afternoon in question."

Blueskin felt the witness's eyes meet his for a moment, and then Mr. Higgins said:

"I have no doubt whatever—that is the man. I cannot be mistaken. I noticed his face particularly, and you will admit that his countenance is one which, if once seen, could never be forgotten."

"That will do, then, Mr. Higgins. You can stand down, so far as I am concerned. I don't know whether the prisoner has any questions to ask you."

"I have no questions to ask," said Blueskin, "but——"

"Stop, stop!" said the judge. "You will presently have an opportunity afforded you for making your defence."

"But, my lord, I merely wished to say——"

"But you must not! Have you any questions to ask?"

"No, my lord, but——"

"That will do, then. You must reserve your defence. Stand down, Mr. Higgins. And now let the next witness be called."

Blueskin became silent, for he found it was no use to attempt to speak.

Folding his arms across his breast, he looked frowningly and angrily around him.

He could see that the chances of his having fair play were very faint indeed, and that, in spite of the absence of Jonathan Wild, the trial would terminate just as the thief-taker desired it should.

CHAPTER CCCLXXX.

BLUESKIN IS FOUND GUILTY OF A HIGHWAY ROBBERY, WHICH HE NEVER COMMITTED, AND SENTENCE OF DEATH IS PASSED UPON HIM.

"CALL Mr. Robert Siggers!" said the junior counsel.

There was a stir in one corner of the court, and then in a moment afterwards Mr. Siggers, the companion of the delectable Mr. Daniel Higgins, stood in the witness-box.

He was a tall, hulking fellow, whose appearance was certainly the reverse of respectable, notwithstanding the very palpable fact that he had taken extraordinary pains with his toilette.

His hair was cut very short at the back of the neck and so round to his ears, in front of which, coming down from his temples on to his cheeks, were two lank pieces of hair, which were coiled up at the ends into a hook-like shape.

His forehead was low, his nose flat, his mouth large, and the whole of his countenance was characterised by an expression of ferocity and mean cunning.

He made a kind of circular bow when he entered the witness-box, and kissed the bible with great unction when the oath was administered to him.

He turned round then with a smile upon his lips and awaited his interrogation.

The junior counsel rose again.

"Your name is Robert Siggers, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, it are."

From this reply it would seem that Mr. Robert Siggers's notions of grammar were as peculiar as his looks.

"Very well. Do you remember the 7th of October last?"

"I do, sir!"

"What happened then? Please to tell the Court."

"Me and my friend Higgins drove to Barnet. It happened to be the fair, and we wanted to pick up a hoss apiece if we could do so cheap."

"Well, never mind that. You went to Barnet."

"Yes, sir, but we lost our journey. We didn't buy no hoss, bekos the price were too high!"

"Oh, so you returned with a good bit of money about you?"

"We did, sir."

"Well, what happened on your way home?"

"We were stopped by a man on hoss-back, who held a double-barrelled pistol in his hand, which he pointed at us, and threatened to blow our brains out without we handed him over all the money and valuable property we had about us."

"And you complied with the demand?"

"Yes, we gave him all we had, which was a goodish deal, bekos when we set out we meant to buy a hoss apiece, which we didn't do, bekos, as I said before, they was too dear."

"Very well, Mr. Siggers. You sat in the cart or trap, or whatever the conveyance was by the side of your friend Mr. Higgins, who was driving?"

"That is quite correct, sir."

"Did you see the man's face when he rode up to the trap and took your money?"

"Yes, sir, almost as plain as I can see yours now."

"How did that happen?"

"Why the sun had not set very long before, and it was only just duskish like."

"Oh, indeed! Well, now, Mr. Siggers, be good enough to turn round and look at the prisoner at the bar, then tell the Court whether that is or is not the man who committed the robbery you have described."

Mr. Siggers pretended to look very earnestly at Blueskin for a moment or two, and then he said, slowly and with emphasis:

"That is the man! I could tell his face from a thousand!"

This was a very conclusive and emphatic mode of swearing to anyone's identity, and the jury looked at each other, as much as to say, "That's settled."

The judge, addressing Blueskin, asked him whether he wished to put any questions to this witness.

Blueskin replied in the negative.

He could see that it was quite folly to say anything to these people who had been so thoroughly and efficiently drilled by Jonathan Wild. So Mr. Robert Siggers was allowed to leave the witness-box in peace, for which he was very thankful, if one may judge by the alacrity with which he stepped down.

"Call Mr. Noakes!" said the junior counsel.

The Governor of Newgate left his seat at his desk and took his stand in the witness-box.

When the preliminaries had been gone through, the counsel said:

"Your name is Mr. Noakes, I believe?"

"Yos, sir."

"And the position you occupy is Governor of the prison of Newgate?"

"It is, sir."

"Do you know the prisoner at the bar?"

"I do."

"What is his name?"

"He is generally called Blueskin, but I believe his real name is Joseph Blake."

"That is all, Mr. Noakes, thank you."

"Do you wish to say anything to this witness?" asked the judge.

"He is a bitter foe of mine!" said Blueskin, "and would do anything —"

"There—thero! That will do! Stand down, Mr. Noakes!"

The Governor left the witness-box.

"That is the case for the prosecution, my lord," said the junior counsel, as he sat down.

The barrister who had taken upon himself the task of defending Blueskin, at a sign from the latter came towards him.

Blueskin whispered something rapidly into his ear, but the barrister shook his head, as he replied:

"I am afraid it is no good—however, I will try."

With these words the counsel returned to his place, and, standing up, said:

"My Lord and gentlemen of the Jury,—

"As you must be well aware, I am not in a position to defend this man properly, although at the wish of the learned judge I appear here on his behalf.

"I have no brief—I have no witnesses to call, and the only instructions I have received are those which have been given me in a whisper a moment or two ago.

"I have, then, gentlemen of the jury, simply to state that the prisoner entirely denies the charge which has been brought against him.

"He maintains that he is perfectly innocent of it.

"On the night in question he was nowhere near Finchley or Barnet, and he also affirms that never until this morning had he beheld either Mr. Higgins or Mr. Siggers, and that the details of the case were as new to him as to any person in the court.

"He admits that when searched at Newgate a watch was found upon him, but he declares that the watch to which Mr. Higgins has sworn is not the same one, but another which has been substituted for it.

"He adds, moreover, that Jonathan Wild swore to be revenged upon him, and has adopted this means of keeping his oath.

"Mr. Noakes, too, he states, has been suborned to give evidence against him, and that the whole of the affair has been concocted by Jonathan Wild.

"Gentlemen of the jury, this is the statement made to me by the prisoner, and this is the only defence I have to offer in his behalf; and if what I have said has the effect of casting a doubt upon any of the evidence brought before you, it is your duty to give the prisoner the utmost benefit of that doubt."

The counsel for the defence sat down.

His address, however, did not seem to produce any great effect either upon judge or jury.

The counsel for the prosecution now rose, and it was clear he intended to exercise his right of reply.

"My Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury,—

"I have a few more remarks to make with reference to this case, but they will not occupy me a moment.

"I should be loth to detain you even for so short a time, only duty compels me to speak.

"You have heard, then, the words just uttered by my learned friend who undertook to defend the prisoner unprepared.

"The statements made by him came from the prisoner himself, and therefore I should like to call your attention to them.

"You cannot have forgotten, gentlemen of the jury, the communication which the learned judge handed to you for your perusal.

"That communication states that the prisoner made a most desperate and cowardly attack upon that valuable public servant, Mr. Jonathan Wild.

"Now, I would like you to compare that action with the assertion that Jonathan Wild fabricated this charge against the prisoner at the bar.

"I shall leave you to draw your own conclusions from it.

"In my opinion, a clearer and more distinct case was never placed before a jury for decision."

The counsel sat down, and there was a general buzz in the court, during which the jurymen whispered nonsense to each other, and the judge turned over his notes.

At length he ceased, and looked up.

The crier, who had had his eye upon him all the while, immediately cried out: "Silence!"

All became still, as if by magic; and then the judge, in a

mumbling voice, which Blueskin could scarcely understand, commenced his address to the jury:

"Gentlemen of the Jury,—

"The prisoner at the bar is charged with committing a highway robbery on the road between Barnet and Finchley, shortly after sunset on the evening of the 7th day of October last past.

"Mr. Higgins and Mr. Siggers, two citizens and tradesmen in London, who have given their evidence before you, have sworn to the particulars under which the robbery was committed. What one said exactly agreed with what was uttered by the other.

"Both, without any hesitation, identified the prisoner at the bar.

"They have sworn that he was the man who committed the robbery, as they had a good opportunity of looking in his face, and the face happens to be one which once seen could never be forgotten or mistaken.

"Then, a police officer has been brought before you who states on his oath that he searched the prisoner as soon as he was brought into the lobby.

"Upon him he found money to a considerable amount and various miscellaneous articles, among which was a very large old-fashioned watch, almost as unmistakable as the countenance of the prisoner at the bar.

"This watch is shown to Mr. Higgins, who swears it is the one taken from him by the highwayman upon the Finchley road.

"He has no doubt upon the matter, the watch having been in his possession for a long time, and having been his father's before him.

"The chain of evidence is then complete.

"Every link is perfect; and all that is done towards rebutting any portion of it is the statement made by the prisoner through our learned friend, which statement, gentlemen of the jury, I need scarcely say is not, in my opinion, worth even a momentary consideration.

"It would never do to remand a prisoner or declare him not guilty upon such grounds as these, especially when the evidence is so very clear and complete as it is in this instance.

"Indeed, I may say that it has rarely fallen to my lot to have a trial brought before me in which the evidence is so clear and conclusive.

"Gentlemen of the jury, it is your duty to consider over the evidence given, and then give a verdict in accordance with that and your own consciences."

The judge ceased.

The jurymen just whispered to each other, and then sat down again.

They were not long in coming to a conclusion.

The usher of the court then addressed them, and said:

"Gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," responded the foreman of the jury, in a firm voice.

The verdict took no one by surprise.

All expected what it would be.

Indeed, under the circumstances it was scarcely possible for them to pronounce a verdict of a different character to the one they gave.

There was a brief silence, and then the clerk of the arraigns said:

"Prisoner at the bar, what have you to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

"I can only repeat what I said before," replied Blueskin, in a clear and steady voice—"I am innocent of the crime laid to my charge; and I state again that Jonathan Wild has fabricated all on purpose to have his revenge upon me."

While Blueskin was speaking these words, the judge was fumbling under his desk for the black cap.

This he put on, and then said:

"Prisoner at the bar, you have had a fair and impartial trial for a very heinous offence, for which the law of the land awards the penalty of death. With the justice of the verdict given by the jury I heartily and cordially agree, and I now proceed to pass sentence upon you."

The judge paused, as though to conceal his emotion.

"The sentence of the Court upon you is, that you be taken hence to the place from which you came, and

afterwards to the place of common execution, and that you be there hanged by the neck until you are dead; and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul!"

Blueskin felt someone touch him on the shoulder.

He turned round, and beheld his tormentor, Mr. Noakes.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXI.

BLUESKIN PARTIALLY REVENGES HIMSELF UPON MR. NOAKES AND THE JUDGE.

"HE! he!" laughed the Governor, with a malignant chuckle—"who was right, eh? I told you how it would be, old fellow—and here you are. I'll look after you, never fear, and then I and the country at large will have the pleasure of seeing you, and your infamous associate, Jack Sheppard, dangling at the end of a rope from Tyburn tree!"

These words were uttered in a tone of voice quite loud enough for Blueskin to hear, but yet not loud enough to be audible to those who were in the court, though all could see that the Governor was saying something to the prisoner.

Very little attention was paid to them, however.

The interest of the trial was over.

But the attention of every person present was destined to be aroused to the utmost extent.

Blueskin heard these words; and, coming upon his ear at the moment they did, they exasperated him greatly.

He had already had a partial revenge upon Jonathan Wild, and now he thought was an opportunity to pay off the Governor for old scores.

He had long promised himself some kind of retaliation for all that he had suffered at his hands, and these words which the Governor spoke had the same effect upon Blueskin's wrath as a drop of water has when added to a cup already full to overflowing.

He felt that he could endure no more.

His eyes flashed when the last words left Mr. Noakes's lips, and before that worthy had the least idea that the prisoner contemplated such an act, Blueskin doubled up his fists—for the reader will remember he stood in the dock unfettered—and gave the Governor two such cracks, one with his left hand on the mouth, and the other with his right just betwixt wind and water, that down he went like a shot.

A terrible scene of confusion now ensued.

Those people who saw that a contest of some kind or other was taking place in the dock raised an alarm that the prisoner was attempting to make his escape.

The panic thus caused very quickly subsided, however, for the first thing the turnkeys did was to seize Blueskin and hold him tightly.

It was perceived that he was a prisoner; and having accomplished his purpose, Blueskin stood perfectly still, without making the least resistance.

Some more officials now made their appearance and hastened to the assistance of Mr. Noakes.

With some trouble they lifted him up, and then found that he was in a very damaged condition indeed.

His mouth had swelled up in an incredible manner, and an ensanguined stream gushed from his nostrils.

He gasped for breath, for the second blow had materially disarranged his breathing apparatus, so that he looked like some huge, overgrown fish suddenly transported from its native element and left on land.

The judge fixed his massive gold spectacles imposingly upon his nose, and looked severely towards the prisoner.

As soon as something like order and quiet were restored, he addressed him:

"Prisoner at the bar," he said, "what can be the meaning of this unseemly conduct I know not, and I regret that I have no power to punish you further. But the extreme penalty of the law has been awarded you, and this, perhaps, is the reason that you behave thus, knowing full well that your miserable life is forfeited, and that your outraged country can do no more than deprive you of it."

It would certainly seem as though some feeling of utter desperation had taken possession of Blueskin.

It was either that, or else his encounter with Mr. Noakes had had the effect of putting his blood up.

Whichever of these it was, matters not.

No sooner had the judge uttered these words than Blueskin, by a sudden effort of strength, freed his hand from the grasp of the turnkey who held it, and seized the massive pewter inkstand which stood on the Governor's desk close by.

Then, before either of the turnkeys could seize his arm again, or prevent him from executing his intention, Blueskin buried the inkstand with all the force he was capable of across the court.

He aimed it at the judge.

That functionary saw the missile coming, and ducked his head to avoid it.

That was an unfortunate movement.

Blueskin's aim was not very correct, but it so happened the judge, in his anxiety to escape the blow from the inkstand, put his head just in the way of it.

"Take that," said Blueskin, "and serve you right! You are another of my foes, and I regret I cannot make you feel my resentment."

The judge rubbed his head with a rueful air.

The edge of the pewter inkstand was sharp, and as it happened to catch him edgewise, it inflicted a gash just above his eyebrow, from which the blood streamed plentifully.

It mingled with the ink, which was splashed over his face, and gave him a very ludicrous aspect.

The counsel for the prosecution, fearing that he should next come in for a share of the prisoner's vengeance, made a dive under the table to get out of danger.

He was immediately followed by his junior, for he, too, was alarmed, and a prodigious scuffle ensued between them.

But Blueskin was once more quiet and peaceable, and stood with a smile of satisfaction on his lips, for he felt that to some extent he was revenged.

The blow which the judge had sustained was a severe one, and yet it was not severe enough to deprive him of consciousness.

Several of the officials and persons connected with the court hastened to his assistance, but he waved them aside, and, with a face which looked just the colour of pickled cabbage, he cried:

"To the cells with him—to the cells! Why do you linger? Do you wish to afford him the opportunity of doing still more mischief? To the cells, I say!"

"Yes, to the cells! Number eighteen!" cried Mr. Noakes, spasmodically. "Off with him! I shall be well enough to follow directly. Look alive, now!"

The turnkeys began to haul Blueskin off very roughly, but he said:

"Now, my friends, there's no need to be violent! I have no grudge against you yet, and don't want to have. If you will let me alone, I will accompany you as quietly as you like."

The turnkeys had the wisdom to give heed to his words, and they found he was quite in earnest.

Ere he descended the stairs in the corner of the dock, he gave one farewell glance round the court.

He would have been content if he could have inflicted some punishment upon Mr. Higgins, and his satellite, Lob Siggers, but they had both vanished.

The next moment Blueskin was on the way to the condemned cells.

Mr. Noakes specified No. 18, because that happened to be the darkest, dampest, and most disagreeable of the whole series.

It was some satisfaction to the Governor to have him placed there.

In this miserable place, then, was Blueskin immured.

Mr. Noakes took upon himself the responsibility of having him heavily ironed, and so, loaded with fetters, the prisoner was left to ponder upon his situation.

There we will leave him.

While Blueskin was thus made an inmate of one of the condemned cells, Jack Sheppard was busily engaged in making his escape.

The reader now will not be so much at a loss to account for Jack having been able to pursue his occupation unmolestedly.

The cessation of Jonathan Wm's periodical visits to the prison has been accounted for.

The reader will also understand how it was that on the night when Jack made his escape Jonathan never came near the cell at all.

The fact was, that while Jack Sheppard was very hard at work, his mortal foe was lying in a very precarious condition indeed.

The wound in the throat which Blueskin inflicted turned out to be of a more serious and dangerous character than the apothecary had imagined, and the terrible outbreak of rage to which the thief-taker had given way had not made it any better.

Mr. Sproll sat by the side of the bed upon which Jonathan lay.

He was watching him.

He was compelled to do this, so critical was the condition of his patient.

Could Jack have had a peep into this chamber, it would have spared him some uneasiness.

He would not have been haunted with apprehensions of the thief-taker as he was.

Mr. Noakes, with pain and difficulty, did discharge his duty of visiting Jack, but it was late when he did so, for he was a long time recovering himself sufficiently to perform such a duty.

He satisfied himself with a glance that all was well, and then retired without looking farther.

And so Jack had the night all to himself, for the turnkeys, who were all tired, took the utmost advantage of the Governor's mishap.

The manner in which Jack escaped will be fresh in the remembrance of the reader.

We described the scene which took place in the thief-taker's house while he looked down upon the roof of it.

Wild, junior, had chosen this opportunity for making his insidious proposals to Edgworth Bass, because he knew that he had no interruption to fear from the "guy'ner," as he called him.

The act will show how much he cared for his father's condition.

Jack had things all his own way.

Such a favourable conjunction of circumstances was far more than he could have hoped for.

And so he was able to creep into the shed in the fields early the next morning without being either seen or pursued.

In fact, his escape was not discovered until the turnkey went the first round in the morning.

The consternation of the official is a thing to be imagined, not described.

In the same careless manner as ever, he undid the fastenings on the door of Jack's cell.

Then he tried to push the door open.

But it stuck in its frame.

This was owing to the operations Jack had carried on underneath it.

Exerting a little more strength, however, the door gave way, and that rather suddenly.

The turnkey lost his equilibrium, and put his foot inside the cell to recover it.

But when he did so he did not notice the rather deep excavation which Jack had made when he attempted to work his way out by getting under the door.

The consequence was, that he stepped into it with more abruptness than was at all pleasant or agreeable.

In fact, he sustained some very serious bruises, and was a moment or two before he could breathe.

The first use he made of his voice was to utter some very diabolical curses, which he levelled at everything and everybody.

Then he recovered himself sufficiently to lift up his head and look about the cell.

What he saw, for the second time deprived him of breath.

His eyes glared fearfully as he took in the whole aspect of the cell.

Then he gave utterance to a most dismal yell, which echoed and re-echoed through the vaulted passages of the prison.

"Murder!" he cried. "Jack Sheppard has escaped! Oh, what shall I do? Oh, there will be the devil to pay, and no pitch hot!"

Uttering these words, the turnkey scrambled out of the hole in the floor.

Just as he regained his feet several of his companions, alarmed by the uproar he had made, appeared upon the scene of action.

"Jack Sheppard's escaped!" vociferated the turnkey.

"He has escaped! Run some one and tell the Governor."

"Run yourself!"

"What for?"

"I would rather you told him than me. Why, he will discharge us everyone."

"It can't be helped!"

"Ring the alarm-bell, then, and someone follow me; perhaps, after all, he has not got out of the prison. Ten to one, now, if we do not find him hiding somewhere."

There was some hope in this, and while one of the turnkeys ran off to ring the alarm-bell, and otherwise spread the alarm, the remainder, with greater calmness than they had yet been master of, set to work to examine the cell, and ascertain by what means the prisoner had left it.

The hole in the floor near the threshold puzzled them a great deal, for they could not think why it had been made until they saw the iron plate which had stopped the prisoner's further progress, and then they immediately understood that his intention had been to burrow underneath it, and then make his way through the stones in the passage.

This point settled, they turned to the chimney, and then they saw the quantity of masonry that had been dislodged and piled up on the floor.

It was really most astonishing.

The reader will remember that when Jack had succeeded in getting one stone out of the chimney, he held it between both hands, and used it as a kind of hammer, and in this way he soon demolished the wall.

As soon as they had overcome their surprise at the aspect which the cell presented, the turnkeys made a rush to the chimney, and commenced scrambling up it.

They were only a minute or so gaining the Red Room.

As soon as they reached this, they saw, to their surprise and dismay, that the door, which had remained so long closed, was gaping wide open.

They rushed out into the corridor at once, and so on until they came to the door which led into the chapel.

Here they paused, and for a moment were at fault.

At first they did not see the place where the spike had been broken off, and when they did perceive it, they could not believe that, slim and agile as Jack was, he had the power of squeezing himself through so narrow an aperture.

It was while they stood here that they were startled by hearing a terrific cry in the rear, which sounded like the yell of some wild beast.

The sound was followed by the rushing of footsteps.

Involuntarily they turned round and caught sight of Mr. Noakes.

He was hurrying towards them, gesticulating violently, like a madman.

"Ten thousand devils!" he cried—"thunder and lightning! what is the meaning of this?"

"Jack Sheppard has escaped!" cried the turnkeys in chorus.

"Damnation! Curse you all, you lie! I saw him safe in the cell last night myself!"

"He has escaped! He has made a hole in the chimney, and so got into the Red Room; the door of this he has forced open, and got here. Look! he has broken off one of the spikes and got into the chapel, and, as we all very well know, that is the high-road to the leads."

Mr. Noakes uttered another cry, more terrible than the first.

He seized his hair with both hands, and violently plucked it out by the roots.

Then he executed a perfect dance of rage and pain.

"After him!" he cried at length, when his senses came back to him a little—"after him! Open the door, idiots! He can't have got away! If he has, I shall lose my place for certain, and Jonathan Wild will murder me! Open the door, idiots, I say!"

"I'm a-hopening it, sir!"

The door creaked back on its hinges, and then the Governor made a frantic dash into the chapel, with all the turnkeys at his heels.

The chapel was now thoroughly illuminated, and they all caught sight in a moment of the door which opened into the passage communicating with the leads.

But recollecting that this passage was defended by another strong door—the strongest, perhaps, in the whole prison—the Governor took heart, for he was not without the hope that after all they would find the prisoner baffled in his attempt to escape.

CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

JONATHAN WILD IS MADE AWARE OF JACK SHEPPARD'S ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE IN RATHER A PECULIAR MANNER.

BUT that hope was, as he soon found, a fallacious one, and a fresh outbreak of impotent rage was the result.

That door, upon the strength of which he so much relied, had been wrenched open like the rest, with a power that seemed superhuman.

The Governor now abandoned himself to despair.

Still he kept on until the roof of the prison was gained.

So great was the despair of the Governor—so much did he dread the result of this escape—that he felt as though he could thank the man who pitched him over the parapet into the street below.

He had not the courage to take the fatal leap himself.

The turnkeys hastily dispersed themselves about the roof, and in a very little time discovered the blanket by the aid of which Jack had descended on to the roof of the house that adjoined the prison.

The loud cry they uttered upon seeing this had the effect of congregating all the others about the spot.

There was no longer any doubt about the route which Jack had taken.

Nor was there any room for the conjecture that he might be even now lurking about the prison.

The tattered blanket swinging lazily backwards and forwards in the morning air made all clear.

But though it was so clear that Jack had gone that way, the turnkeys did not feel at all inclined to risk their necks by attempting to follow him.

They shook their heads as they admitted it was running too great a risk.

How long they would have remained looking down upon the roof of the house is very hard to say.

The Governor was the first to recover himself.

"Follow—follow!" he cried. "After him—quick! He cannot possibly have gone far! Follow—follow, and you will overtake him! If he gets off, we shall all be discharged!"

"Sorry for that, sir!" replied the turnkeys; "but perhaps you would like to try the blanket. It don't look to us to be over secure."

"Fools—dolls—idiots!" screamed Mr. Noakes; "you are all in league with him, and are wasting time purposely in order to allow him a better opportunity to escape than he has at present! Follow me, all of you! Hesitate at your peril, and I will report you all!"

With these words, Mr. Noakes made his way, not to the blanket, but to the door in the leads. He jumped down on to the lower leads, though in a manner that seemed to show he was utterly regardless of personal consequences.

He did not lose his footing, however, but darted through the little door, ran along the passage, crossed the chapel, and made his way by the nearest possible route to one of the doors opening into the Old Bailey.

The turnkeys followed at his heels in a disorderly throng.

They were anxious to recapture Jack Sheppard, if such a thing was possible, for the consequences to them would not be very pleasant if he should happen to get off entirely.

The alarm was now very general.

By this time there was not a person in the prison who was unacquainted with the startling fact that Jack Sheppard had escaped.

The dismal tolling of the alarm-bell of Newgate, which proclaimed the escape of a prisoner, still continued.

The clanging sound extended far and wide over the City, for as yet the hour was too early a one for many persons to be astir.

The sound penetrated into all the rooms of the thief-taker's residence.

It reached the one in which Mr. Snoxall still sat watching his dangerous patient.

The worthy apothecary gave a great start when the sound came upon his ears, for he had lived too long in the vicinity of the prison not to know what the tolling of that bell meant.

It darted into his mind in a moment that Jack Sheppard had been successful in effecting a third escape.

Mr. Snoxall glanced apprehensively towards his patient.



JACK SHEPPARD CUTS DOWN TEBURN TREE TO PREVENT THE EXECUTION OF BLUESKIN.

Jonathan Wild languidly opened his eyes. The blind was drawn, so that the full glare of daylight did not come into the room, but nevertheless the thief-taker's eyes were too weak to bear it, and he closed them again.

Mr. Snoxall hoped he would go off to sleep again, and doubtless his wish would have been gratified, had not the bell continued to toll with ever-increasing loudness.

Wild opened his eyes again, and this time did not close them.

He made several contortions with his mouth, and at length, with a great effort, gasped out:

"Wh—wh—what is that?"

"What, Mr. Wild?"

"Curse you, you know what!"

The apothecary shook his head.

Jonathan grinned impotently and savagely.

"Ah, Mr. Wild," said Mr. Snoxall, "you are very bad indeed!"

"Bah!—stuff!"

No. 79.—BLUESKIN.

"I am sorry to say it is the truth, Mr. Wild—Blueskin almost did for you."

"Ten thousand curses!"

"If the knife had been a little keener, or if your neck had not been so well protected, he would have had your head off!"

An inarticulate howl was the response to this.

"Keep quiet, Mr. Wild—pray keep quiet! If you excite yourself, I will not be answerable for your life. It hangs upon a thread, Mr. Wild—it does indeed!"

Jonathan was silent.

"You must not move, Mr. Wild—you must not speak, hardly, for a day or two. I will try my best to save you."

"Tell me this—tell me this—and then I will be quiet!"

"Tell you what, Mr. Wild?"

"Is the trial over?"

"Blueskin's?"

"Yes."

"It is, Mr. Wild."

"And the verdict?"

"Guilty."

Jonathan Wild burst out into a loud fit of unnatural laughter.

"Is this your promise, Mr. Wild?"

"I had forgotten. But I am all right now. What glorious news!"

Jonathan closed his eyes again.

He was about to gloat over the idea that Blueskin was at that moment the inmate of one of the condemned cells, but his reflections were destined to be interrupted.

The horrible clangour of the bell, which had ceased for a moment, now began again.

Jonathan Wild opened his eyes once more.

"What is that?" he asked.

Mr. Snoxall trembled.

He was in hopes that Jonathan would lie down and be content.

When he was asked this last question, he did not, for a moment, know how to reply.

The thief-taker repeated his interrogation.

"You asked me that before," said Mr. Snoxall.

"I know I did. Why don't you answer me?"

"Did you not see me shake my head?"

"Oh, d—n your head!"

"Very good, Mr. Wild! I have told you the consequences of exciting yourself! Your life is in your own hands, not in mine!"

"Will you tell me what that is?"

"What, Mr. Wild? I would tell you anything you want to know if I thought it would keep you quiet."

"Then just tell me what is the meaning of that horrible ringing which seems to go through and through my brain—it seems as though it would lift the top of my head off?"

Mr. Snoxall thought of an expedient.

He resolved to pretend not to hear the sound, but to set it down to his patient's imagination.

"Ah, Mr. Wild!" he said.

"What do you mean by 'ah,' villain?"

"It is as I feared!"

"What is?"

"This is the result of exciting yourself."

"How do you mean?"

"That noise, Mr. Wild—that ringing sound—exists nowhere but in your own imagination."

"Eh? What?"

"I say it exists only in your imagination."

Jonathan glared fearfully at the speaker.

"Can't you hear it?" he said.

Mr. Snoxall trembled, as he said:

"No."

"Not hear it?"

"No, Mr. Wild!" he added, with increasing confidence—"the sound which you have described takes its origin in your brain, and is audible to your ears alone."

The thief-taker looked at the apothecary with a puzzled expression.

The clanging of the bell still continued.

He evidently did not know what to think of it.

There was something too palpable about the sound—if we may be allowed the expression—for him to be able to set it down to his imagination.

Jonathan Wild was a cunning man; and, though he laid upon the bed in such a desperate condition, yet his cunning did not desert him.

He hit upon a scheme which he fancied would assure him whether the ringing was imagination or reality.

The scheme was to put his fingers closely in his ears, so as to shut out all outward noises; and then if he heard the ringing he should set it down to his own imagination.

If on the contrary, however, when he closed his ears he shut out the ringing of the bell as well as all other sounds, then he should come to the conclusion that it was reality, and that, for some reason or other, Mr. Snoxall was misleading and deceiving him.

Jonathan closed his ears at once.

The moment he did so the ringing seemed to cease as if by magic.

In a moment afterwards, however, he could hear it but with extreme faintness.

He removed his fingers from his ears, and when he did so the ringing appeared to become ten times louder than ever.

Then, like a flash of lightning, Jonathan Wild understood what had happened.

He started upright in bed as though galvanised.

"An escape!" he yelled. "It is an escape! It is the alarm-bell of Newgate, and not imagination! Yes—a prisoner has escaped! But who? Not—! No, no—not him! Not Jack Sheppard; Jack Sheppard has not escaped! That would be too, too terrible!"

"Mr. Wild," said Mr. Snoxall, in an earnest tone of voice, "let me implore you to be calm! Cannot I make you sensible of the consequences of this excitement—your wound will prove a fatal one!"

"Silence!" said Wild—"I will know the truth! Who has escaped?"

"I know not."

"You lie! You do!"

"I don't, Mr. Wild! I don't believe anyone has escaped—I have not heard of it. This is mere delirium!"

"Fool! Tell me no more such stuff! I can hear the clanging of the bell, which is never tolled except when some prisoner makes his escape. Call Quilt Arnold—I will learn the news!"

"Mr. Wild, I dare not call him—I cannot!"

"If you do not I will jump out of bed and call him myself—I am determined to know what has happened without delay! Will you call him, or shall I?"

"Mr. Wild, I leave you to your fate!"

"Will you call him?"

"I will—but I will no longer be responsible for your life."

"D—n you! who wants you to be responsible? Call him, I say!"

Mr. Snoxall thought it would be best to comply, so he opened the door of the room and went to the head of the stairs.

Here he called for Quilt Arnold.

The summons was quickly responded to by that worthy making his appearance.

A glance was sufficient to show anyone that he was the bearer of very important news.

The moment Wild caught sight of his face was enough.

"Speak!" he cried; "tell me the worst! I know it already. Jack Sheppard has escaped?"

"He has, Mr. Wild."

"I knew it! But—but—Quilt—he has been recaptured?"

Quilt shook his head.

"I am sorry to say he has not."

"How escaped? Not been recaptured? Surely he cannot have got clear off?"

"He has indeed, Mr. Wild, and left no trace behind him, while as for—"

Quilt Arnold stopped suddenly in his speech.

Jonathan Wild sprang out of bed, uttering a yell like that of some ferocious wild beast.

He hastily proceeded to attire himself.

Mr. Snoxall watched him with silent wonder, but made no attempt to prevent him.

He knew the uselessness of it.

But Wild trembled.

He stamped his foot violently on the floor, as though by that means he could recover his firmness—but the attempt was a failure.

He felt himself growing weaker and weaker, and strove his utmost to bear up against the feeling, but he could not.

Ere he had half completed the operation of dressing himself he fell to the floor insensible.

He was then replaced in his bed.

Leaving him here, we will return to Mr. Noakes and his followers.

They had marked the house well upon the roof of which Jack had descended, and, after having once gained the Old Bailey, hastened towards it with all the speed they were capable of making.

Upon arriving, they commenced making their inquiries, for they thought it not improbable that Jack Sheppard might still be in the house.

But the evidence of the servant-girl into whose mouth Jack Sheppard had thrust the lighted candle was quite conclusive upon this point.

She did not know, of course, who the flying figure was, but she described the manner in which someone darted past her.

As well as she was able to do so, she indicated the direction in which Jack Sheppard had gone, and this was the only information they were able to obtain.

Mr. Noakes was like a madman.

The prisoner had evidently got clear off, and they had no other resource than to commence an immediate pursuit, in the hope that he might ere long be captured.

The Governor of Newgate returned to the prison in no enviable frame of mind.

He was apprehensive not merely of what the authorities might say and do, but he was terribly alarmed at the thought of Jonathan Wild.

"What will be his anger," he asked himself, "when he knows of it?"

Mr. Noakes shuddered as he asked himself the question. He had one consolation.

"Thank goodness!" he ejaculated, "he's laid up, and cannot possibly get out. How lucky, to be sure! Dear me, I feel quite thankful to Blueskin for putting him out of the way, I do indeed! Why, if Jonathan had been in his usual health—Oh dear!"

The prospect of what would have happened forced a sigh from Mr. Noakes's lips.

He did not dare pursue the subject further.

His thoughts now reverted to Jack Sheppard.

Again there came from his lips another volley of curses.

Mr. Noakes was indeed terribly frightened.

It was scarcely possible he should be able to retain his comfortable post of Governor of Newgate after a prisoner had broken out three several times.

He would have been discharged before, only he happened to have some friends who possessed considerable influence, and whom he had induced to make use of it in his behalf.

On the present occasion he feared that their influence would be of no avail, so strong would be the feeling against him.

However, he forwarded the intelligence to the proper quarter, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that in less than half an hour afterwards police officers would be dispersed in every direction charged with the special duty of apprehending Jack Sheppard.

The Governor hoped that by the time Wild recovered himself sufficiently to get about, Jack would be once more in Newgate.

Nevertheless, Mr. Noakes did not sit down to his breakfast that morning with a very good appetite.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIII.

JACK SHEPPARD DISCOVERS THAT THE BOW STREET RUNNERS ARE ON HIS TRACK.

HAVING brought the narrative up to the present point, we shall now be able to return to the proceedings of Jack Sheppard, and describe what befell him when he left the shelter of the shed in the fields.

We have shown the reader how it was that Jonathan Wild did not pay his visit to the cell that Friday evening.

We have shown the reader how it was that Jack Sheppard was able to gain the shelter of the shed early the next morning, without being seen by any of his pursuers.

Indeed, when he entered the shed was just about the time when the discovery of his escape was made.

But before night came—that night when he emerged from his place of concealment to obtain food—all the police officers that could be spared for the purpose were sent off in every direction in search of him.

By the time he glided off into the fields all London was ringing with the fame of this exploit.

It was the topic of conversation everywhere.

And not only in London, but in all the towns and villages adjacent to it, to which the news was quickly transmitted.

But Jack Sheppard fully expected all this, and when he set off upon his expedition he perfectly comprehended the amount of danger he was about to run.

But the cravings of nature must be supplied.

A great many hours had elapsed since he had taken any food, and he could tell by the sinking feeling that at times came over him that if he waited much longer he should swoon from sheer exhaustion.

The hope of being able to procure something quickly

lent him strength, and he hastened across the fields in a westerly direction with remarkable speed.

He had no idea where he was going.

His intention was to continue on in a straight line until he came to a place where such articles as he required could be procured without danger of detection, or, at any rate, of capture.

And so, looking in the darkness more like a shadow than aught else, he flitted over the fields, more often over his ankles in water than not.

But he heeded not this.

As, however, he continued on his way without coming to a habitation of any sort, a sensation of deadly sickness came over him, and he feared that, after all, he should not have strength enough to accomplish his purpose.

But he struggled on manfully, however, for in the distance he could discern a few twinkling lights.

Towards these he directed his steps.

They seemed to mock his advance, and recede from him, but that was mere fancy, and he knew it.

They were plainer soon.

As he drew nearer to the village—for such indeed it was—he proceeded with less haste and greater caution.

He knew full well how necessary it would be for him to be thoroughly upon his guard.

He would have to consider attentively every step he took, and keep perpetually on the look-out for danger.

Jack Sheppard knew what wonderful energy and sagacity Jonathan Wild possessed, and he knew how active the search would be which he would institute.

He little thought that his powerful foe was helpless in his bed-chamber.

He was as far from thinking that he had left Blueskin behind him in the prison from which he had just escaped, or that Edgworth Bess was confined in the thief-taker's house.

Jack Sheppard entered the village.

It consisted only of one long straggling street, with houses dotted here and there along the sides of it.

But, as the hour was yet early, lights could be perceived at the windows of most of them.

The first place to which Jack came was the village inn.

To him this place seemed the very personification of comfort, after the rough quarters he had just left.

A bright light came from the windows on either side of the door.

This proceeded as much from the huge wood fire that was burning in the grate as from the flickering oil lamp which was suspended from the ceiling.

Jack crept towards one of these windows with a stealthy step.

The blind was not drawn down to the bottom.

There was just space enough left for him to peep through.

He did so.

He caught sight of the huge blazing fire, the very look of which seemed enough to warm one.

He saw the comfortable seat and the sanded floor.

He saw the villagers sitting round the tables with huge tankards of foaming ale before them.

Complacent content was the predominant expression perceptible upon their countenances.

They seemed by appearance as though care and trouble were unknown to them even by name.

Jack could not bear to look upon this scene.

It offered too powerful a contrast to his own position, which by comparison with them seemed a thousand times more forlorn and wretched than it had ever done before.

He turned away from this public-house with a very heavy heart.

He struck his breast and sobbed bitterly.

But Jack Sheppard was not one to succumb for any length of time to saddening emotions.

Making an effort, he shook them off, and, like a true philosopher, instead of grieving over his position, set to work to try to make it better.

He recollected the errand upon which he had come, and blaming himself for ever having gone near the public-house, he set about his original intention.

This was to find some small general shop where he could enter and purchase a few eatables without exciting suspicion.

Like a shadow, then, he glided along the street, keeping

close under the shadow of the houses, and otherwise concealing himself from observation.

At length Jack found what he had been looking for.

He paused before a small cottage, only one story high, which had evidently been built for many years.

It had but one window on the ground floor, and that was a very small one.

The panes in it were very small, and diamond-like in shape.

The glass of which they were formed was green in hue, and only semi-transparent.

A miserable rushlight burned feebly in this window.

By the aid of it, however, Jack was able to see that he had reached a little huckster's shop, where everything is sold for which there is the least demand.

The character of the articles displayed for view was heterogeneous in the extreme.

But Jack caught sight of bread, and cheese, and eggs, and various other articles.

He could not see whether the shop was occupied by anyone.

He looked up and down the street, but he could not see anyone stirring.

All was as silent as the grave.

After ascertaining this, he resolved to enter the little shop, let the risk be what it might.

No sooner had he come to this determination than he approached the door.

It was closed and fastened with a primitive string and bobbin to lift up the latch.

Jack opened the door.

As he pushed it open on its hinges, a little bell began to tinkle.

This was a notification that someone had entered.

Jack closed the door behind him, and then, upon looking round, he saw, to his great relief, that there was no other customer in the shop.

A wheezing, asthmatical kind of cough now attracted his attention, and, looking in the direction from which the sound proceeded, he perceived an old woman emerge from behind a pyramid of bottles of lollypops.

A glance satisfied Jack that he would not have much to fear from her, for she looked aged enough to be mother to the oldest person in all the village.

She was purblind, and very deaf, and she found her way to the counter more by feeling her way than by the use of her eyes.

In loud, querulous tones, she said:

"What do you want?"

"A loaf!" said Jack.

"Eh?" said the old woman.

She put her hand behind her ear as she spoke.

Jack then understood that she was deaf.

"A loaf!" he said, putting his mouth as close to her ear as he could.

"Well—well! I ain't deaf! Only a little hard of hearing, that's all. Do you want a quarten loaf?"

"Yes, two!"

The old woman produced the articles named.

"What else?"

"Two pounds of cheese!"

This, after a great deal of fumbling, the old woman also produced.

Jack then bought a quantity of eggs, and not being able to see anything else in the shop of an eatable character, save some bacon, which would require a fire to cook it, asked her how much the things came to.

The poor old woman added them up correctly enough.

Jack was surprised, for he did not think she could perform such a feat.

But then, she had been used to the same thing every day of her life for very many years, so that it almost became a kind of natural instinct.

Jack paid for the things out of the small sum of money he possessed, and having stowed them about his person in the best manner he was able, left the shop.

He retraced his steps with an exactness which would have surprised anyone who was not aware of the carefulness with which he had noted every object he had passed on his way.

His return journey led him past the village alehouse, and, though he had been so angry with himself for having ventured on the former occasion, he bent his steps towards the window once again.

Why he did so he could scarcely tell.

Some irresistible fascination seemed to draw him thither.

But he was well repaid for his pains, since he was made better aware of the extent of his danger.

The interior of the room in the inn now presented a very different appearance to what it did when he looked in a little while before.

Then all was quiet, contented peace

Now all was excitement.

Everyone of those persons who had been sitting down at the table were now standing up.

They were congregated round a man who Jack immediately recognised as a Bow Street Runner.

The peculiar style of dress, with the glaring red waistcoat did this, just as the blue suit enables anyone to recognise a policeman nowadays.

This Bow Street Runner was standing in the middle of the tap-room, and the villagers were standing in an irregular circle round him.

Their mouths were wide open, and their faces expressive of the utmost curiosity and interest.

The wax-tipped ends of their long clay pipes no longer remained between their lips.

They had removed them in order to be able to pay more attention.

The Bow Street Runner held in his hand a printed paper.

From its limp state, it could be seen that it had only just been printed.

The officer was evidently reading the contents of this bill to his attentive auditors, though Jack had no other proof of it than what his actions provided, for he could not hear a single word.

But the officer's lips moved, and the occupants of the room had all assumed listening attitudes.

The wisest thing Jack could have done under these circumstances would have been to fly, for, beyond all question, the bill which the officer was reading related to himself.

He could not see a word of it, but he felt sure that it contained the intelligence of his escape from Newgate, together with the offer of a large reward to any person who might capture him, and lodge him in one of His Majesty's jails.

But although he was so certain of this, Jack did not attempt to move.

He stood with his face glued to the window-pane, all his senses absorbed by the scene that was taking place before him.

His danger and his hunger were alike forgotten in the invincible desire he felt to see all that was going on.

He watched, then, until the officer had finished reading the bill, and then he saw him turn round and say something in rather a loud tone of voice.

Jack could only distinguish one word in all he said.

That one word was—"Reward."

This over, the officer smoothed the bill out upon one of the tables, and stuck it against one of the walls in the tap-room in a very conspicuous position indeed.

Jack could see it, but it was too far off, and the light too insufficient for him to be able to make out even the large letters.

Having stuck the bill up in the manner described, the Bow Street Runner pointed to it and said something more.

Then he abruptly quitted the room.

Jack Sheppard now thought it was high time to be off.

The Bow Street Runner might be about to leave the inn, and if he did so, Jack would run considerable risk of being seen.

So, without waiting another moment, he once more glided off into the darkness, taking his way across the pathless fields towards the shed which had afforded him safe shelter so far.

He made his way hither, because he knew of no better place to which he could repair.

He was puzzled once or twice, for the darkness was in truth perplexing; but after a moment's consideration he would set forward again.

At last the ruined shed appeared in sight.

Desolate as it had looked when he first beheld it, it now seemed to Jack something like a home

Entering, he closed the door.

The interior was pitchy dark.

He shivered, too, with cold—with that damp, raw cold which seems to strike from the ground.

He deposited his eatables upon the ground.

How great a comfort a fire would have been!

The genial warmth would not only have made that dismal shed appear more cheerful than it did, and warmed his chilled blood, but it would also, he fancied, have alleviated the aching and smarting of his legs, which were terribly galled by the fetters, and swollen to more than twice their usual size.

His feet and legs, too, were very wet, and the damp garments clinging to his skin materially increased the discomfort which he experienced.

But he was compelled to banish the thought, for a fire was utterly out of the question.

He had not the materials wherewith to make it, for everything was soddened with water; nor had he the means of striking a light—if he had, he would not have worked his way out of Newgate in the dark as he did.

So he was forced to abandon the idea altogether.

He contented himself with thinking that his position might be much worse, for he might not have any food.

Now, however, he was well provided with eatables, and there was no fear that he would perish of starvation just at present.

The eggs he ate raw.

In this way they were not so palatable as they would have been if cooked, but Jack ate them because he knew what a large amount of nutriment they contained.

He finished up his meal with a little of the bread and cheese, and tied the remainder up for future use.

Then, feeling much exhausted, he lay down in the warmest and most comfortable corner he could find, and composed himself to sleep.

The deep silence and the darkness were provocative of slumber, and in a few moments Jack was unconscious of everything.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIV.

JACK SHEPPARD FINDS IT NO EASY MATTER TO GET RID OF HIS FETTERS.

WHEN Jack Sheppard awoke it was broad daylight.

He started to his feet and looked about him.

But he saw nothing to excite alarm or apprehension.

On the contrary, all was as still as it had been during the whole of his stay there.

Going to the door of the shed, he once more looked out.

But the prospect was as cheerless as ever.

The rain still continued to fall down, without scarcely any intermission, and all the fields he could see were partially under water.

The ground, too, was so thoroughly saturated with water, that it seemed as soft as a bog.

It made Jack uncomfortable when he saw the state of the weather, and he entered the shed again.

Sitting down, he partook of some more bread and cheese, after which he felt much better.

The first and most important thing he had to do was to get rid of his fetters, but how to do this was as great a puzzle as ever.

Still, it was quite certain he would be obliged to disencumber himself of them, or else they would inevitably betray him, let him go where he would.

But how was this to be done?

Jack set to work to think.

He was rather clever in a general way in getting out of these sort of difficulties, but on the present occasion he was baffled.

He had not a tool of any description wherewith to rid himself of them, and his hands were quite useless of themselves.

It was a long time before Jack could think of any expedient whatever, but at last he hit upon one.

Still, it was one that did not please him, and he would have been glad to devise a better; but he could not, so he was obliged to put it into execution.

It was to obtain two stones, and place the ring of his fetter just where it fitted over his ankle upon one, while the other he was to use as a hammer.

In this way he hoped to be able to beat these rings or bawls into an oval form.

If he could do this he felt sure he should be able to slip his heels through, and so get rid of them.

Having resolved upon this course, he looked about him for the stones, and having found two that would answer his purpose, he set to work in the manner we have described.

But the iron was too strong to be bent by any such means.

Moreover, every blow he struck inflicted excruciating pain upon him.

But Jack Sheppard would not have minded that much, if he could have seen that he was making some progress with his work.

He had, however, no such encouragement.

He could not see that he had made the least impression on the strong iron rings, and finally he flung away the stones in despair.

He could almost have wept, so great was his disappointment; but he controlled this manifestation of weakness.

Still he might have been excused for giving way to grief in such a manner.

It was a most disheartening prospect to look forward to.

The difficulty of getting his feet out of the fetters would surely never be less than it was at that moment, and yet he had tried his best, and found it impossible.

Perplexed and grieved, Jack let his head sink between his hands, and for some moments gave way to despair.

He had stayed in that shed quite as long as it was safe for him to do so. It was a lonely, out-of-the-way place certainly, but still there were times when it was visited, and when cattle were stored in it, as the condition of the floor testified.

Any visit, then, could not fail to be dangerous to Jack.

But while the iron work still weighed upon his limbs, how was he to leave. There was great peril in travelling by night, and should anyone see the fetters, discovery would be certain.

And not only this, Jack Sheppard was anxious in the extreme to discover the whereabouts of Edgworth Bess, and take measures for removing her from Wild's custody.

He wished, also, to find his old comrade, Blueskin, and be guided by him as to the best plan of action for him to adopt.

But he was confined in that shed almost as much as if it was a prison.

His legs pained him dreadfully.

In hammering the iron rings with the stones he had bruised his own limbs, and their swollen disordered state made them more than ever sensible to pain.

He had not the courage to try this again.

Suddenly he started.

The sound of a footstep came upon his ear.

It came upon him with great abruptness, and, as it seemed, the very moment he heard the step the door of the shed was thrown open.

Jack was sitting down.

He had no time to start to his feet, so he endeavoured to cover over his fetters with the tails of his coat.

A man appeared upon the threshold.

A stout, red-faced, irascible-looking man, who in every way was the living personification of an English farmer.

Jack resolved to sit still, and brazen the matter out as well as he could.

He fancied that while he remained in this position there would not be so much to fear from a recognition.

Everything would depend upon whether this man had heard the intelligence of his escape, and learned that a large reward had been offered.

If he was ignorant of this, Jack fancied he should be able to invent a plausible tale that would deceive him.

This was almost too much to hope for, though.

Had he not with his own eyes seen a police officer in the ale-house of the next village reading a bill offering a reward for his recapture?

Such news would quickly spread in a little place where generally there was a great dearth of subject matter for conversation, and it was too much to hope that this man was quite ignorant of all.

These thoughts, which we have set down at some length, flashed through Jack Sheppard's mind in the course of a single moment.

At first the man did not see Jack, for he happened to be sitting down in the shade.

But as soon as he caught sight of him, the man cried:

"Hallo—hallo! Who have we here?"

"A poor devil," replied Jack, in a whining voice, "who will be heartily glad of a little assistance."

"But who are you? What are you doing here? Don't you know this is my cattle-shed, and that you are committing a trespass? Come, get up—tramp!"

Jack uttered a dismal groan.

"There, there—don't make that awful noise! Get up and be off, and think yourself lucky that I let you off so easily!"

"Worthy sir!"

"Eh—what?"

"I say I am very tired," said Jack. "I have travelled many miles, and just when I was ready to lie down in the road and die of exhaustion, I spied this shed in the distance, and crawled towards it in the hope that I might rest myself for a little while."

"Bah—stuff! Get out! Do you think I can have my cattle-shed made a resting-place for all the tramps in the kingdom? It isn't likely! Be off with you!"

"Let me stay here a little longer, good sir!" said Jack, who began to hope that this farmer-looking man had no suspicions of who he was; "I am so very tired, and when I have rested a little while, I will go my ways in peace."

"Oh! will you?"

"I will indeed, sir!"

"But I don't intend you should remain here, and that's flat!"

"Surely, sir, you wouldn't be so cruel as to force me to leave this place when I have not strength enough to walk? I am not doing you any harm, good sir, nor your shed either. You will let me stay, sir, will you not?"

"Who are you, then? Tell me who you are, and then I'll see."

The farmer relented a little, being evidently touched by the manner in which Jack spoke to him.

Now was the time, then, for Sheppard to exercise his invention, for it would never have done to have confessed who he was.

Without appearing to hesitate, he replied:

"As I told you, sir, I am a poor unfortunate devil who was unlucky enough to get into a scrape."

"What sort of a scrape?"

"Well, you see, sir, I am an apprentice, and lived in the house along with my master, Mr. Smith."

"And what's your name?"

"John Jones, sir, at your service."

"Well, go on, and tell me what sort of a scrape you got into."

Jack laughed.

"I don't know what you will say to it," he said; "but the fact is, I got very friendly with my master's servant."

It was now the farmer's turn to laugh, and laugh he did with great heartiness.

There was something which tickled his fancy in Jack's apparently candid avowal.

"Go on!" he cried, controlling his laughter with difficulty—"go on, you dog, do. I can't help laughing, it so reminds me of a—But go on, you rascal, go on!"

Jack was well pleased to think he had put the farmer into a good temper, and this encouraged him to proceed, and call still further upon his imagination.

"Do you want to know all, sir?"

"Of course I do, you rascal! Ha, ha! And what was the result of you and your master's servant being on such good terms with each other?"

"A very natural result!"

"What was it?"

"Why, some little time afterwards my master found an increase had taken place in his family."

"Good—good! What next?"

"Why, now comes the unfortunate part of my story, and the reason I am in this plight."

"Well, well! Go on!"

"My master sent the girl packing as soon as he could, and her child as well; and then what do you think the ungrateful girl did?"

"Ha, ha—I don't know! Had you up before the magistrate, perhaps?"

"That was just what she did do. Now, don't you call that ingratitude? Why, she ought to have thanked me!"

"Go on with your tale! It fetches tears into my eyes

—that it does! It so reminds me—! But go on—go on!"

"I have not much more to tell. She swore the child on to me, and the magistrate ordered me to pay half-a-crown a week!"

The farmer rubbed his hands together.

"Just the same!" he said—"just the same!"

"But that isn't all!" said Jack, "He insisted upon my finding security for the regular payment of the money!"

"The devil!"

"Well, I could not find any security—no one would be security for me! I was earning no wages, and was not likely to be for some years. So the magistrate very kindly sent me to Bridewell."

"The deuce he did!"

"I can assure you he did!"

"Then, all I can say, he was very hard upon you! Perhaps you wonder why I laughed at you? I will tell you. When I was a youngster I got into the same scrape myself, and had half-a-crown a week to pay for thirteen years! Ha, ha!"

"Perhaps you were able to pay the half-crown?"

"Well, yes, I was."

"That's just the difference between you and me, then. I was sent to Bridewell."

"And how did you get out?"

"Escaped."

"Eh?"

"Escaped."

"Escaped from Bridewell?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And what have you been doing ever since?"

"Travelling from London on foot."

"And where are you going?"

"To Staffordshire, where all my friends reside."

"Oh!"

"But I got tired on the way, and, having no money in my pocket, could not get a night's lodging at an inn, so I crawled in here to rest myself."

"Are you sure you are speaking the truth?"

"Yes."

"Well, all I can say is you have been very hard done by. But some how or other, I can't exactly believe it."

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't."

"I am sorry for that, sir; and if you will let me stay here a little while longer until I have rested myself, I will depart and give you no further trouble."

"Well, well! I can't help disbelieving you, you know."

"Of course not!"

"However, stand up, and let me have a look at you! When I see what you are like, perhaps I shall believe you."

"Why do you want me to stand up?"

"To see you."

"Can't you see me here?"

"No, for hang me if I don't think you have got into the darkest corner of the shed! I can't see you a bit. Stand up, I say, and let me have a look at you, or you sha'n't stay in this shed a moment longer."

The reader will understand that the farmer had not seen Jack's fetters, and was quite ignorant that he was encumbered with anything of the kind.

But if Jack stood up, he could not fail to discover it.

This would most likely engender suspicion.

Jack was in a dilemma.

He had very little time for making up his mind, but in the end he decided that the best thing he could do was to stand up and explain the circumstances as well as he could.

So he rose to his feet.

But as he did so, he could not prevent his fetters from clanking dismally against each other.

The farmer started back a pace.

"What is that?" he said.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Jack.

"Nothing?"

"Well, that is, nothing particular."

"Stand up, then!"

"I am standing up."

"But come here to the light! Let me look at you!"

Why, may I never drink again if you have not got fetters on?"

"I know that—didn't I tell you so?"

"No."

"Well, I thought I did."

"But how come you with fetters on?"

"They were put on."

"What for?"

"While I was in Bridewell."

"But what for?"

"Oh, nothing particular! I hit the jailer a topper once, and they said I was violent, and put these irons on me; but I made up my mind to escape, and I did so."

"Oh indeed!"

"Yes—here I am!"

"I see you, and I'll tell you what, my fine spark—I don't half like the look of you!"

"I am sorry for that."

"I daresay you are, but it strikes me you look more like some desperate burglar or murderer than anything else!"

"Well, everyone is entitled to his own opinion; and I am sorry my appearance does not please you."

"It don't, and that's flat!"

"I have told you my history, and I thought you would be sorry for me."

"Did you?"

"I did indeed!"

"Then I ain't! I don't like the looks of you a bit, and the sooner you walk your carcass out of my shed, the better I shall be pleased!"

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH DISCENNUMBERS JACK SHEPPARD OF HIS FETTERS.

JACK SHEPPARD was sadly afraid that the suspicions of the farmer were aroused, and that he guessed who he really was; still, he was loth to think this without some better evidence of the fact.

"I will go directly," said Jack, "if you would lend me a hammer and a punch, to get rid of these fetters; and I would thank you into the bargain!"

"I daresay you would, my spark; but I have no hammer and punch to lend you, so you will have to do without; and let me tell you this once more, if you want to please me, get out!"

"But it can't do you any harm to let me stay here! Let me rest myself and I will depart. You will never see me again, for I am going to a distant part of the kingdom."

"And a good job too!"

"I wish I was there."

"Well, you can stay and rest yourself!"

"Many thanks."

"But, mind you, I don't believe one word of all the long story you have told me, except that you have broken out of prison, and that I can readily credit."

"I am sorry that you disbelieve me, sir," said Jack, "but at the same time I feel more thankful than I can express that you have promised to let me stay here to rest myself, for I feel now that if I attempted to walk a few yards I should sink to the earth."

"You do look tired, and if you have travelled from London with that weight at your heels, I am quite sure you must be! I am not hard-hearted enough to turn you off, but don't let me see you here when I come back again!"

With these words the former rather abruptly quitted the shed.

Jack hastened to the door and watched him take his course across the fields.

By the attitude of the farmer he could tell that he was thinking over what had just occurred.

"This will no longer be a place for me!" said Jack to himself. "I must be off—there's no doubt about that. He may not suspect me much now, but if he happens to come across any of those fellows I saw in the public-house last night, and they get telling him about my escape, he will conclude at once who I really am."

There seemed an extreme degree of probability about this.

"Yes, I must be off!" continued Jack Sheppard, unconsciously uttering his thoughts aloud—"I must be off, for

there is no knowing how soon he may make the discovery, and I know very well his head will be full of his meeting with me all the rest of the day. Oh, if I could only get rid of these fetters, how soon would I show them a clean pair of heels!"

But the removal of the fetters now seemed to be a more difficult matter than before, and there were clearly only two ways by which he could rid himself of them.

One was, to file through the thick iron ring.

The other, to punch the rivets out.

There was no longer the least hope of bending them into an oval shape, and slipping them over his heels, as he thought he should be able to do.

The flesh had swollen, both above and below these rings, to such a degree that they threatened to become perfectly buried.

The pain was almost more than he could endure.

He was compelled to call all his fortitude to his aid.

Jack watched the figure of the farmer until he disappeared from view, and then he went back into the shed again.

"I must leave here!" he said. "And yet what a terrible risk to do so by daylight! Would that night would come! Many hours will have to elapse before then! I will try to disguise myself—that is the only thing I can do."

Jack had very limited means of disguising himself, but he made them all available to the utmost.

He took his cap and tore it into shreds, and then bound it on his head with a pocket handkerchief.

He also tore his coat and stockings in many places.

His intention was to make himself look as much like a wandering mendicant as possible.

In this attempt he succeeded tolerably well.

Fortunately his great-coat was long, and this concealed his fetters pretty well.

With one of the strips of cloth he tied them to his legs in such a manner as would, he hoped, prevent them from jingling.

But he could not, with all his art, altogether hide them from view, though they might escape notice at a casual glance.

As soon as he had done this, Jack made a hearty meal, and stored the rest of his provisions about his person in the best manner he could.

Then he cautiously peeped forth.

He was unable to catch a glimpse of anyone.

Not without some regret he emerged from the shed.

It had afforded him safe shelter for many hours, and consequently he felt a kind of affection for it.

Now, however, it was untenable.

Jack glanced up at the sun, which was shining brightly in the sky, though rather low down on the horizon.

This glance enabled him to define the four points of the compass.

He determined not to make his way back to the village from which he had procured the provisions, but to leave it on his left hand, and take a northerly direction.

His intention was, if he could get rid of his fetters, to make his way back to London by a circuitous route.

Every few yards he went he would pause and look keenly and searchingly all around him, so as to be aware at the earliest possible moment when any persons made their appearance.

But he seemed to have those fields all to himself, for he was not able to see a single individual.

Encouraged by this, he pushed on, and ere long he quite lost sight of the shed.

Whether the farmer returned to it was more than he ever knew.

Concealing himself as much as possible by walking behind hedges, and stooping down as he went so that his head should not be seen above them, Jack proceeded for a long time without meeting with any interruption.

At length, however, he saw a village in the distance before him.

What village it was he had no idea, but fancied it must be Tottenham.

To approach this any more closely would be unwise, especially during daylight.

Besides, he had already got quite as far away from London as he desired to be.

He was looking forward to the time when he should return to the scene of his old exploits.

Under these circumstances, then, he very naturally looked about him for some place of concealment.

But he was unable to see another shed.

Still he cast his eyes all around, but he could see nothing but some tall evergreen trees, which grew at a little distance to the right of the spot upon which he stood.

He debated in his own mind whether he should hide in one of these.

"I have heard of such a thing," he muttered. "Did not King Charles hide in a tree when all his enemies were after him? Of course he did. And why shouldn't I?"

There was no earthly reason why Jack should not follow his example if he thought proper.

Jack paused a moment to consider.

"I have a great mind to try it. I can't see any other place, and I am very tired. I have some hours to wait, and I think I could spend them as well there as anywhere. It's no good walking on any further; I will climb up and chance it.

Having made up his mind, Jack Sheppard directed his steps towards the little clump of trees which had attracted his notice.

They were conspicuous in consequence of the deep green colour of their foliage, which showed out in remarkable contrast to the bare and leafless branches of the other trees.

On his way Jack abated none of his caution.

He was somewhat surprised to find, however, that these trees grew on the margin of a rather broad road.

Upon seeing this, Jack hesitated as to whether he should carry out his original intention.

By the appearance which the road presented, it seemed as though it was tolerably well frequented.

Still, from behind the hedge where he stood Jack commanded a view for a considerable distance up and down it, but he could not see anyone approaching.

"It's no good hesitating," he said at length. "There seems to be nobody about. I will climb up, and who knows? I might discover something!"

To Jack Sheppard the task of climbing a tree was very easily performed, and though his fetters were in the way he accomplished the feat without difficulty.

For one thing, the branches grew so near the ground that he had but to give a spring and take hold of one with his hands.

All he had to do then was to draw himself up by means of the muscles in his arms.

In less time, then, than anyone would have believed was necessary for the accomplishment of such an act, Jack Sheppard was up in the tree and ensconced among the branches.

From the road below he felt there was no danger of being seen, for the long dark branches of the tree afforded an effectual screen.

Jack Sheppard fancied he should be able to spend the day here quite comfortably.

Ere long, however, he perceived in the distance the form of a man.

He was on foot, and trudging along at a steady pace.

There was nothing in his appearance calculated to attract notice, and yet Jack looked at him attentively.

The reason for this was simple enough.

Jack had nothing whatever to do to pass away the time, and this was the first human being he had seen since he parted with the farmer.

He watched this man, then, with a degree of curiosity and interest that was really remarkable.

As the man came nearer, Jack noticed that he carried in one hand a kind of pail or can.

In the other he carried what looked like a bundle of walking-sticks.

Jack grew more interested than ever.

The next thing he noticed was that the man carried a kind of pouch, which was suspended from his shoulders by a leather strap.

What was in this pouch Jack could not tell.

The man trudged on steadily enough until he came to the tree in which Jack was concealed.

Then he paused.

Jack's interest now gave way to wonder.

"I think that will do!" the man said.

As he spoke, he put the can he was carrying down on the ground, and as soon as Jack caught a glance at this he

understood what the man was, and what his object was too.

He was a bill-sticker.

The can contained a brush and a quantity of paste.

The bundle of sticks he used for placing the bills against any object which he could not reach without their aid.

The pouch by his side contained bills.

Jack received practical proof that his surmises were correct, for, with the speed and dexterity produced by long practice, he posted a bill on the trunk of the tree.

So intently was Jack occupied in watching this man that he had failed to notice that a man was approaching from the opposite direction, and did not see him until he halted close to the bill-sticker.

"Hallo!" he cried. "What's the game, mate?"

The bill-sticker turned round.

"Can't you see?" he asked.

"I can see summat sticking to the tree."

"Can't you read?"

"Not I! What do I want with larning?"

"Well, since you can't read," said the bill-sticker, "I will tell you what it says on that paper, and when you hear it, if you don't wish you had learned to read, call me a horse!"

"Go on, then, let us hear it!"

"Well, it offers five hundred pounds reward for the apprehension of the notorious burglar, Jack Sheppard!"

"Lor! five hun—"

"Dred pounds!"

"My eye!"

"You understand the King offers this money to anyone who shall capture this Jack Sheppard and lodge him in jail!"

"Lor, does he? My eye! Don't I wish I could drop across him!"

"Listen!" said the bill-sticker. "He has escaped from Newgate, in which prison he lay under sentence of death. He is a young-looking chap—very thin. Inclined to be dark—is dressed in the costume of a gentleman, and is supposed to have part of his fetters upon him."

"Oh, lawks, don't I wish I knew where he was!"

"Well, keep your eyes open, and look well at everybody, and then you will stand as good a chance of obtaining the reward as anyone else."

"Won't I, that's all! Good morning, Mr. Bill-sticker! I must go; but I be much obliged to you, I be!"

With these words, the rustic continued on his way.

The bill-sticker took up his apparatus, and trudged off in the opposite direction.

We leave the reader to imagine Jack's feelings while he listened to this conversation.

He watched the two men until they were both out of sight.

"How pleasant!" he said, at length. "I suppose that infernal bill-sticker will go on pasting those bills up everywhere. Why, England, in a little time, will be too hot to hold me. Confound him! And that other lubber. What shall I do?"

Jack Sheppard was rather perplexed.

He rubbed his head reflectively.

"I don't see why I should leave that bill there!" he said. "I will go down and get it. It will make one the less. I don't see either, why I should be annoyed by people stopping to read it just under my nose; besides, I should like to know what it is about."

Jack looked up and down the road very carefully.

He could not, however, see anyone coming.

Cautiously, and yet rapidly, he commenced the descent of the tree.

Just before he quitted the protecting shadow of its branches, he gave another glance up and down the road. But it was quite deserted, and so, without more ado, Jack dropped on to the ground.

To possess himself of the bill was but the work of a moment, for the paste was quite wet, and he stripped it off the bark of the tree very easily.

Crushing it up, he thrust it into his pocket, and ascended the tree with all speed.

In a moment more he had gained his old position.

With trembling hands, then, he smoothed out the bill and began to read it.

He found the bill-sticker was quite correct.

A reward of five hundred pounds was offered by the Government for his apprehension, to be paid to any person



JACK SHEPPARD PAYS HIS PROMISED VISIT TO SIR JAMES THORNHILL.

or persons who should lodge him in one of His Majesty's prisons.

The bill gave no particulars of the manner in which he had effected his escape, but simply stated that he had broken out of Newgate while confined there under sentence of death.

The document concluded with a tolerably accurate description of his personal appearance.

Having read the bill from beginning to end twice, Jack crumpled it up again and put it into his pocket.

"This is a very comfortable state of things!" he remarked—"I shall fancy now that every person I see has read one of these infernal bills and is on the look-out for me! Well, never mind—I cannot help it! I should advise those who attempt to interfere with me to look after themselves—that's all!"

With these words, Jack relapsed into silence.

His meditations, however, ran chiefly on the bills, and the effects they were likely to produce.

In this manner he passed away the time until night.

No. 80.—BLUESKIN.

Plenty of people and vehicles passed below him along the road, but of course no notice was taken of him.

He made another hearty meal from his store of provisions, and then, when night came, he felt not only rested, but strong too.

He did not venture to descend until it was quite dark.

Then he lowered himself out of the tree.

The road which the trees skirted was deserted, and he made up his mind to run the risk of proceeding along it like an ordinary pedestrian.

There was a gap in the hedge close by, and through this he forced his way.

In another moment he was in the road, trudging slowly towards the village.

CHAPTER CCLXXXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD MEETS WITH A FRIEND AT AN UNEEXPECTED MOMENT.

It was a very dark night.

Jack was glad of this, because there was less fear of his being discovered or noticed.

Without meeting with a soul, or having any incident worthy of record, Jack walked about a mile along the road.

He then came in sight of some buildings, and he immediately became more cautious in his progress.

All the way he went, however, his mind was occupied with one idea.

That was, to get rid of his fetters.

He felt that for the sake of being free from them he would gladly run a considerable amount of risk.

Presently Jack paused.

Just a little way further on, on the left-hand side of the road, he could see the dim outlines of a shed.

From the window and door of this place there issued bright but fitful beams of light.

Jack guessed in a moment that it was a blacksmith's shop.

Here, then, was a place containing the tools that would free him from his fetters.

But was there any hope that he would be able to obtain them?

He crept forward slowly.

In about a moment, the blacksmith's shop was reached.

Jack paused near the window, which consisted merely of an aperture in the wall, which could be closed, if necessary, by a wooden shutter.

Grasping this shutter, Jack bent forward, and peeped into the shed.

It contained only one person.

He was a blacksmith evidently, and was engaged at his trade.

Jack watched for several moments.

"Shall I risk it?" he asked himself. "Perhaps I can bribe him to remove the irons! I have some money by me, and I could not put it to a better use. I have a good mind to try. Suppose I tell him the same tale as I told the farmer? He believed it, and why should not this blacksmith? I have a great mind to try it on."

Jack deliberated some moments longer.

It was no trifling thing that he was about to do.

The blacksmith probably enough had seen one of the bills offering a reward for his apprehension, and if so, he would recognise him from the description at once.

Had his position been less desperate than it was, Jack would have continued on his way, in the hope of getting rid of his irons in some less dangerous manner.

But, under the circumstances, he resolved to make the trial.

He walked slowly to the door of the shop.

The fierceness of the blaze had now somewhat decreased, so his body was not revealed with that degree of brightness that it would have been had he entered a little while previously.

Hearing a footstep, the blacksmith looked up from the piece of iron he had been fashioning.

He eyed his visitor inquiringly.

Jack stepped in quickly, and took up his position in the shade.

"Who are you?" said the blacksmith. "What do you want?"

In reply to this interrogation, Jack repeated, with little variation, the tale that he had told to the farmer.

In conclusion, he said:

"So now you know how it is that I have got these fetters on. I am not very rich, but I dare say I could find twenty shillings to give you, if you would take a hammer and punch, and knock the rivets out!"

The blacksmith shook his head.

"You have told me a very plausible tale," he said—"a very plausible tale indeed! It might do with some folks, but it won't do with me! Oh dear no!—not at all! I know you!"

Jack started violently, and clenched his fists.

The blacksmith rested his arms on the handle of his sledge-hammer, and looked with a smile into Jack's face.

"Yes," he said, "I know you! You are Jack Sheppard! I have seen a bill offering five hundred pounds to anyone who should lodge you in jail!"

Jack uttered a curse.

"It's a fact, I can assure you!" said the blacksmith, calmly.

"Well, since you know who I am," growled Jack

Sheppard, "perhaps you will try to take me prisoner? For your own sake, I should advise you to let me alone! You will find it no easy matter to effect my capture! I look a stripling, I know, but I have more strength than perhaps you would give me credit for!"

"Don't put yourself about!"

"I don't intend."

"I mean, you have no cause to be frightened of me!"

Jack laughed.

"I never was frightened yet!"

"You either don't or won't understand me!" replied the blacksmith. "I know you—I recognised you in a moment—but I wish you no harm. You are a clever fellow, and I admire you for your cleverness!"

The blacksmith held out his hand as he spoke.

Jack was so surprised by this speech, so different as it was to what he had expected, that for a moment he stood quite bewildered.

He did not know whether to take the proffered hand or not.

The blacksmith observed his hesitation, and seemed to understand it.

"Do not feel doubtful of my good faith," he said. "I assure you I am quite sincere! Shake hands with me! We shall be friends—I feel certain of it!"

Jack recovered himself.

He looked keenly into the blacksmith's swarthy countenance.

The result of the scrutiny was perfectly satisfactory.

The expression which appeared upon it was certainly friendly to him.

Therefore Jack hesitated no longer, but stretched out his hand.

The blacksmith seized it with manifest eagerness and pleasure.

He shook it warmly—rather too warmly to be pleasant.

Jack could scarcely endure the pressure.

"I seems, then, that I have found an unexpected and unlooked-for friend," he said.

"You have!" responded the blacksmith, heartily.

"But how is it that you are not tempted by the reward?"

"I am not—let that suffice. I don't want such dirty money—I don't believe it would do me or anyone else any good. You have done what was firmly believed to be an impossibility, and I think that you fully deserve your freedom, now that you have made your escape!"

"I wish my foes would think so!" said Jack, with a sigh—"they do not, that is quite clear, or they would not have offered such a large reward for my recapture!"

"Very true! They do not, that is certain; but still, I think you fully deserve your freedom, and I will help you all I can."

"Thanks—thanks!" said Jack, who was completely overpowered when he found how friendly-disposed the man was to him.

"Thanks—thanks! You have indeed the power to perform a service for me, the value of which is quite beyond calculation!"

"I rejoice to hear it!"

"These fetters, which I have asked you to knock off for me, are terrible impediments; and, unless I am freed from them, all my previous exertions will be thrown away."

"Say you so?" cried the blacksmith; "then you shall soon be rid of those encumbrances—I will have the rivets out in a twinkling!"

He turned round and searched in a box of tools.

Jack's heart beat high with joy and hope.

Indeed, he could hardly bring himself to believe in the reality of the good fortune which had befallen him.

Having selected a punch that would answer his purpose, the blacksmith approached Jack with a small hammer in his hand.

"Put your foot up on to that anvil," he said, "and in less time than you can say 'Jack Robinson' the rivet will be out!"

Jack put his foot on the anvil, as requested.

He found the blacksmith had spoken truth.

In less time than he could have believed possible, the fetters fell clanging to the ground.

How strange it seemed, that the task which had baffled all Jack's efforts should be so easily performed!

Having the proper tools made all the difference.

One leg having thus been freed from the heavy mass of

iron-work which encumbered it, Jack hastened to place the other on the anvil, in order that it might be subjected to the same process.

When the punch was placed just upon the rivet, one stroke with the hammer did the business.

Jack Sheppard was once more, in every sense of the word, a free man.

"There you are!" said the blacksmith, as he threw the hammer and punch on one side.

"Thanks—thanks!" cried Jack, in a voice which showed how deeply grateful he felt. "Had I the wealth of the world, I could not repay you for this service!"

"Pooh, pooh! Say no more about that, I beg! I never did anything with greater willingness in all my life! However, if you are inclined to show your gratitude—"

"Tell me how I can testify the extent of my obligation, and you will see how readily I shall do so!"

"Well, then, if you would not mind, I should like you to give me a precise account of the manner in which you made your escape."

"I will do so willingly!" replied Jack.

"I mean, I should like you to tell me all—even now you got out of your cell."

"In fact, all the particulars from first to last?"

"Just so."

"If that is all, I will soon do that."

"I desire no more. I don't know how it is, but I have always felt a very great degree of interest in all that you have done. I like your brave spirit, and I would fain hear all I can concerning you."

"I will do my best to satisfy you."

"Come, then—I have done work for to-night! My house is hard by. Come with me, and then you can tell me your tale at your ease."

"But—" said Jack, hesitatingly.

"Fear nothing!" said the blacksmith, who seemed to guess his thought, and to comprehend the meaning of his hesitation—"I am a single man, and live alone in my house; we shall be as much by ourselves there as we are here."

"That is all right, then!" said Jack, "as you must be aware, I am obliged to be very cautious."

"I know you are; but come—all is well, believe me!"

"I do not doubt you."

"I am glad to hear that! It would have grieved me greatly had you suspected me. This way, then!"

The blacksmith passed out of the shed, and closed the door after him.

Jack followed close at his heels.

As soon as he had properly secured the door, Jack's new-found friend led the way to a house which stood at no great distance from the forge.

"Here we are!" said the smith, as soon as they arrived at it—"this is my abode."

He opened the front door, as he spoke, with a key that he took from his pocket.

Jack scarcely knew what to think of this adventure.

He was fully conscious of but one thing only, and that was, that his body was no longer weighed down by the fetters.

Still, he could not think that the blacksmith was insincere, or that he contemplated any evil designs against him.

He seemed to look upon Jack as a very singular specimen of the human race.

He was, too, without the temptation of delivering him up for the sake of the reward, for he had sufficient to satisfy all his wants.

Whatever suspicions might have lingered about Jack's heart were completely dispelled when he entered the house.

His conductor led him into a comfortable room, and placed upon the table a repast such as Jack had not for a length of time beheld.

Foaming home-brewed ale, too, was produced, and the blacksmith invited Jack to eat heartily.

During the meal, and for some time afterwards, Jack occupied himself in relating at length the particulars of his escape from Newgate.

It was easy to see that the blacksmith listened to every detail with the utmost attention.

By his manner, it would seem as though he was treasuring up every word in his memory.

The narrative was one well calculated to inspire interest in almost any breast.

At length Jack finished.

"That is all!" he cried.

"You have paid me over and over," said the blacksmith, "for the service which I have rendered you! I would not have missed such a narrative for the world!"

"I am glad you are pleased with it."

"There is only one thing that I am surprised at."

"And what is that?"

"Nay—nay! It is only a thought of my own, and you ought to know your own business best."

"What mean you?"

"Nothing."

"Come, speak out! There is something which strikes you as being singular."

"Just so!"

"I could tell as much by your manner."

"But never mind; it is no business of mine!"

"Speak out—do speak out!" said Jack, who had a strange, undefined feeling at his heart that he was about to hear something of a very startling character indeed. "Speak out, I pray you! What is it that seems singular?"

The blacksmith looked confused, as though he was at a loss to know how to put his thoughts into words.

He stammered and paused, but said nothing.

Jack's anxiety was unendurable.

"Speak!" he said. "Why do you hesitate?"

"Well, then," said the blacksmith, desperately, "I was afraid of offending you by speaking my thoughts too plainly. I always thought you a brave fellow, and indeed what you have said to-night is quite enough to prove it, and yet I cannot help thinking it strange—"

"What—what?"

"That you, being so bold, should only attempt to accomplish your own escape."

"My own escape?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand you!" said Jack, with a puzzled air.

"I mean what I have said."

"But why should I trouble about effecting the escape of anyone else? I had quite enough to look after myself."

"Why did you not trouble about anything else? That's just what puzzles me."

"Why?"

"When your friend was in Newgate."

"My friend?"

"Yes."

"In Newgate?"

"I have never heard of his escape. Is he free?"

"Who do you mean?" cried Jack, starting to his feet with a suddenness and violence that rather alarmed the blacksmith. "Who do you mean?" he repeated eagerly, almost fiercely.

"Why, your friend."

"What friend?"

"Blueskin."

"Blueskin?"

"Yes. But why all this excitement?"

Jack sank down in his chair again.

He covered his face with his hands.

The revelation had come upon him with as much unexpectedness as suddenness.

The reader will bear in mind that Jack Sheppard was quite ignorant of the fact that Blueskin was a prisoner in Newgate.

That piece of information had been most zealously kept from him by his foes.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVII.

JACK SHEPPARD HITS UPON THE NOVEL EXPEDIENT OF CUTTING DOWN TYBURN TREE IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE EXECUTION OF BLUESKIN.

FOR several moments, Jack Sheppard sat silent and motionless.

The blacksmith regarded him with the utmost surprise. "Blueskin in prison!" Jack murmured at length. "Good heavens, can it be possible?"

"You were ignorant, then," said the blacksmith, "that he was an inmate of Newgate at the same time as yourself?"

Jack looked up.

"Nothing was further from my thoughts. I had no idea of such a thing."

"That accounts for it, then!"

"Had I been aware of it, I would never have left Newgate without him. I would have pulled down every stone until I reached his cell, and would either have escaped with him, or remained behind and kept him company."

"Give me your hand," said the blacksmith, suddenly. "I think all the better of you after that speech. I could not imagine how you could be so selfish as to escape yourself, and leave him behind."

"As I tell you, I had no idea he was in Newgate, and yet I wondered what was the reason he never communicated with me."

"It was out of his power, Jack."

"It seems so."

"Then you know nothing of his trial?"

"Nothing."

"I can scarcely believe it possible."

"I know nothing, I assure you; but do not hesitate another moment—tell me all you know. Perhaps even now I may not be too late to save him!"

"I cannot tell you a very great deal."

"Where was he captured?"

"In Drury Lane."

"At the Black Lion?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Jonathan Wild."

"Well, what next?"

"Blueskin was taken to Newgate, of course, and there he remained until last Thursday, when he was brought up at the bar of the Old Bailey to take his trial."

"What was the charge?"

"Highway robbery!"

"And the verdict?"

"Guilty!"

"I thought so!"

"But stop! I have not told you all—and yet, perhaps you may know this."

"If it is connected with Blueskin's imprisonment, I know nothing."

"Well, then, just when Blueskin was about to be placed in the dock, Jonathan Wild came up to him, and began saying aggravating things."

"Well—well?"

"And so, what do you think Blueskin did?"

"I have no idea."

"Why, he snatched a knife from one of the turnkeys, and cut Jonathan's throat with it!"

Jack shrieked with joy.

"Then he revenged himself?" he said.

"He did."

"Is Jonathan dead?"

"No."

"I thought not!"

"You thought not?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because he was born to be hanged!"

The blacksmith stared at Jack in undisguised astonishment.

Such a thought as that Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, who hanged other people, was born to be hanged himself, had never entered his imagination.

"He had a narrow escape from Blueskin's knife, at any rate," he said—"a very narrow escape indeed! From what I heard last, it seems the chances of his recovery are very slight indeed!"

"He will get over it, never fear!"

He then questioned the blacksmith more particularly with respect to what had befallen Blueskin, and ere long he succeeded in obtaining from him all the information he possessed.

At the end of the conversation, Jack Sheppard rose to his feet.

He had heard that Blueskin's execution was fixed to take place on the following morning.

The night was now far advanced.

What steps could he take—what course could he pursue—to meet the current of events?

He knew not.

"I must leave here at once," he said. "In a few hours day will dawn, and I have more work before me than I shall be able to accomplish, I am afraid! If I fail, I will perish with him; but it will go hard with me if I don't save him!"

The blacksmith was astonished.

Jack took him by the hand.

"Farewell!" he said. "Do not seek to detain me! I am more grateful to you than words or actions can express; but I must leave you! The ties of friendship drag me away! Farewell! I shall never forget you!"

"Nor I you!" said the blacksmith, as he led Jack to the door.

Here they parted from each other.

Jack bounded off through the darkness, and was out of sight in a moment.

He went in the direction of London.

He ran on at full speed in a straight line, disregarding every obstacle that lay before him in his path.

He paused at length.

But it was not until he was compelled to do so by sheer exhaustion.

Panting for breath, he sank down upon the ground.

He had reached the outskirts of London.

And now, for the first time, he began to ask himself what he should do.

It was all very well for him to announce his intention of saving Blueskin or perishing with him, but it was necessary to have some plan for future operations.

What could he do?

That was a question he over and over again asked himself.

But in vain.

He could find no reply.

"I cannot break into Newgate," he said, "and carry him off by main force, that is quite clear! How, then, am I to prevent his execution to-morrow morning? There is no time to get together a number of people and attempt a rescue, or I would try that. There is, indeed, no time for anything!"

He rose to his feet.

"I must do my best. Let me see—where am I? London lies to the eastward. Why—stay! It cannot be; and yet—Yes, it is! I am in Tyburn Fields!"

Jack had spoken truly.

All unconsciously he had directed his steps towards the fatal spot where his comrade was doomed to suffer on the morrow.

The hideous, triangular-shaped gallows was not in sight, but some strange feeling sprang up in Jack's breast, and impelled him to make his way towards it.

He walked on at a rapid pace.

Jack was tolerably familiar with the topography of the environs of London, and he was able to direct his steps to his destination unflinchingly.

At length he halted within a few yards of the gallows, which reared itself sombre and spectral-like from the ground.

The outlines of the dreadful instrument of death were but dimly visible.

They assimilated too much in colour with the dark sky behind.

But Jack made out the three upright posts and their horizontal beams readily enough.

"Accursed tree!" he said, unconscious that he was uttering his thoughts aloud—"accursed tree! Fit emblem of our boasted civilisation! The law's last punishment!—the reward of crime! Your timbers groan for more fruit! The day is not far distant when Jonathan Wild shall hang dangling from your beams; then I shall be satisfied! Yes, I feel that if I can only see that day, I shall end my days in peace! By the evil machinations of Jonathan Wild, my father perished here, and I have with difficulty avoided the like fate. Shall Blueskin be another victim? Never! Rather would I raze the whole structure to the earth! Ha! I have a thought!"

Jack broke off suddenly.

In the midst of his vain exclamations, a thought had occurred to him.

"I have it!" he cried again. "I have it! I know what I will do, now! I will cut down Tyburn Tree! Ha, ha! A good thought!—a very good thought! It shall be done. How astonished the sheriffs will be when they arrive and find the gallows has disappeared! Hurrah!"

I will do it, and then they will have some trouble in hanging Blueskin to-morrow, I fancy!"

It was a strange thought that.

It occurred to Jack by pure accident.

As he said, there would indeed be some difficulty in carrying the sentence of the law into effect.

What permanent advantages might arise from it he did not consider so deeply as he ought to have done.

The idea of razing the gallows to the ground tickled his fancy.

It was an achievement which would give him great pleasure to perform.

But he had not the tools requisite for such a purpose. He resolved to set about obtaining them at once.

An axe was indeed all he wanted.

He glanced around him.

The darkness was most intense.

The spot upon which he stood was about as lonely and desolate a one as any round London.

How different it is now!

Tyburn Fields have been built upon.

They have been covered with palatial residences, and now Tyburnia, as the district is called, is one of the most fashionable in all London.

Upon the very identical spot where the old gallows stood, a noble mansion has been erected.

Those curious in such matters may desire to look upon it.

For the satisfaction of these we give the information.

It is No. 49, Connaught Square.

This square is near the junction of the Edgware Road and Oxford Street.

It is situated, indeed, between St. George's burying-ground and the first-named thoroughfare.

The circumstance that this house stands upon the exact spot where Tyburn Tree formerly was, is specified in the lease.

However, all this is from our story.

When Jack Sheppard looked around him, he could not see the least trace of a human habitation.

Where was he to obtain what he required?

After a moment's hesitation, Jack started off at a run towards London.

He knew he was more likely to meet with houses in that direction than any other.

After going some distance, Jack perceived before him a small house, or rather cottage.

He slackened his speed to reconnoitre.

"Why," he said, "I know this place! I know it quite well! Why, this is Peter Sansom's, who used to work for my old master, John Roots! Why, in time past I have often come here, and I know every trick and turn about the place! I shall get what I want, for certain!"

This was a fortunate thing for Jack.

Until he came in sight of the house, he had forgotten all about it.

Now all rushed back to his mind.

Jack recollected that at the back of the house was a shed in which Peter Sansom was wont to work.

Towards this shed Jack made his way with stealthy steps.

Knowing the ground so intimately as he did, was a great advantage to him.

He reached the door of the shed, and opened it without difficulty and without creating the least alarm.

He entered.

The darkness of the place was profound, but he had no means of procuring a light, and so he was compelled to grope about in order to find what he wanted.

After much delay he succeeded.

His hand grasped an axe which was in a basket containing a number of other carpenter's tools of all shapes and sizes.

Jack seized the axe and took his departure.

With all speed he made his way back to Tyburn.

The night, which had all along been dark and threatening, now changed to rain.

This materially added to the discomfort of Jack's position.

Still he heeded it not.

Delighted to have the means of levelling the hated gallows to the ground, Jack hastened onward.

He was, on the whole, rather pleased with the rain than otherwise, and hoped that it would continue.

He was aware that it was no unusual occurrence, on the night before the day fixed for the execution of a criminal of more than usual importance, for people to take their stand near Tyburn Tree, and wait patiently the hour of execution.

They considered the good position they would thus secure, ample compensation for long hours of waiting.

This rain, however, Jack thought would have the effect of keeping off such loiterers.

It seemed as though Jack was likely to have his wish gratified.

The rain came down with unceasing violence.

The heavens were covered with a dense black cloud, in which not a single rift appeared.

At length Tyburn Tree appeared once more in sight.

With a cry of satisfaction on his lips, Jack approached.

But he instantly became aware of the imprudence of such a proceeding as this, and he at once halted to reconnoitre.

Not a single person, however, appeared in sight.

Feeling assured of this, he stepped forward confidently.

Reaching at length the foot of the gallows, Jack placed himself in the requisite attitude for his purpose.

Then raising the axe above his head with both arms, he brought it down again with full force.

The keen edge of the heavy instrument sank deeply into the wood.

So deeply, indeed, that Jack had some trouble in extricating it again.

This told him that he would have to set about his task in a workmanly manner, or he would not be able to accomplish it.

Not without great trouble he succeeded in extricating the axe.

Having done this, however, he proceeded to use it properly.

Jack was well skilled in the use of the weapon, and knew just how it ought to be employed.

He worked away with right good will.

Crash—crash—the axe descended upon the wood, and each time a huge splinter would fly off.

At length, Jack severed one of the upright posts.

Then, and not until then, did he pause.

He wiped the perspiration from his face.

But he did not rest long.

He went to work again with renewed vigour, for what he had already accomplished gave him great encouragement.

The second post was cut through in less time than the first.

The whole framework now leaned on one side in a very alarming manner.

Indeed, the entire strain was upon the one remaining post, which would make it all the easier to cut through.

Jack felt this, for at the first stroke of the axe the wood gaped open.

Another and another blow followed, and then, with a terrific crash, the whole framework of timber came to the ground.

"It is done!" cried Jack, as the gallows toppled over—"it is done! Tyburn Tree exists no longer!"

Three stumps, each about a foot in height, alone remained to mark the spot where it had stood.

Not content with the destruction he had already caused, Jack set to work to demolish the fragments that lay upon the ground.

He did not cease until he was compelled, by sheer exhaustion, to do so.

Then all that remained of Tyburn Tree was a confused heap of timber.

CHAPTER CCLXXXVIII.

RELATES HOW BLUESKIN STILL FURTHER REVENGED HIMSELF UPON THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

It seems very strange to leave Jack Sheppard standing on that piece of ground so lately occupied by Tyburn Tree, but we are forced to do so, while we direct our attention to Blueskin, whose situation seems desperate indeed.

We left him last in cell No. 18, in which miserable place Mr. Noakes had caused him to be placed.

This was truly a most wretched dungeon.

It was entirely destitute of every comfort.

That every precaution was taken to secure Blueskin, the reader may make himself assured.

When left to himself, he quickly relapsed into the same state of despair as had characterised him before his trial.

The excitement of recent events wore off.

Still, he could not help feeling no inconsiderable amount of satisfaction at the thought that he had partially revenged himself upon three of his foes.

We need not tell the reader that Blueskin was quite ignorant of the fact that Jack Sheppard had made his escape.

Had he possessed such knowledge, it is probable he would have aroused himself from the lethargic state into which he had fallen.

So far, however, from thinking Jack Sheppard was at liberty, he pictured him an inmate of a cell the very counterpart of his own.

It was while thinking upon his companion, and upon poor Edgworth Bess, that he felt some portion of his old spirits return to him.

He raised his head, which had up to that moment been bent towards the ground, and as he did so, he said :

"Why should I despair? It is folly! I ought rather to rejoice! The success which I have already met with ought to have the effect of spurring me on to make further efforts. To be sure, the success was very partial, and yet it was once very near being complete. I will despair no longer. I will shake off this heaviness which has oppressed me so terribly. I will be myself!"

As he uttered these words, he folded his arms across his chest.

"Why not?" he continued, after a pause. "Jack Sheppard has made his escape from a Newgate cell, and why should not I? There is no reason. I will do so. And, a good thought. I will find Jack's dungeon, and rescue him, and we will both leave Newgate together! Then, when that much is accomplished, it will be hard indeed if we cannot complete the discomfiture of Jonathan Wild, now that he is in such a precarious condition! I will escape, and that at once!"

Blueskin seemed quite another man, now that he had made up his mind to pursue a certain course of action.

He felt himself become suddenly endowed with a fresh accession of strength.

He rose to his feet, though it was not without difficulty that he did so.

He was loaded with heavy fetters, but he was not chained to the dungeon wall, probably because there was no staple convenient for the purpose.

He had, therefore, the liberty of pacing his cell accorded to him.

It was doubtless thought, however, that he would not avail himself of this exercise much, owing to the weight of iron he would be compelled to carry about with him.

However, Blueskin rose to his feet, and managed to get as far as the door of the cell.

This he proceeded to examine.

But the result of that examination was by no means satisfactory, if one may judge by the manner in which he shook his head after inspecting the fastenings by which it was secured.

"Force will never take me out of this dungeon, that is certain," he said, as he retraced his steps to his stone bench.

He sat down upon it with evident satisfaction, for the weight of the fetters was terribly fatiguing.

"I must use stratagem," he added. "I must devise some cunning means of making my escape. How shall it be done? Let me think—let me think!"

Blueskin buried his face in his hands, and gave himself up to profound thought.

How long he sat thus he knew not, but it was for a long while.

He was aroused at length by hearing the sound of footsteps.

Then he became aware that it was night, and he was conscious also that all his deliberations had not led him to any practical result.

He listened to the footsteps mechanically.

One person was approaching.

"Doubtless the turnkey making his last round," Blueskin muttered carelessly.

But while he spoke the words, a thought darted into his mind.

A thought, too, of a most startling nature.

It almost took his breath away.

It was a bold and desperate means of making his escape from his dungeon which had occurred to him.

But, desperate as it was, he resolved to carry it out, or at all events to attempt to do so.

He rose instantly to his feet, and crept across the dungeon.

Then he paused and listened.

The footsteps came nearer, and at length halted before the door.

Blueskin's eyes glistened, and he prepared himself to carry out his intention.

A key was inserted in the lock of the door.

Blueskin placed himself in such a position that the door on opening would conceal him from the view of the person who stood upon the threshold.

The key turned in the lock.

The door grated open.

A man appeared upon the threshold.

He carried in one hand a bunch of keys, and in the other a lantern.

He cast the broad ray of light which came through the lens into the cell.

He waved it up and down.

"Hallo!" he cried, in a voice of mingled astonishment and alarm, for he could not see Blueskin standing behind the door. "Where are you gone? No larks, you know! You had better come out!"

Blueskin made no reply to these words, and the individual, who uttered them with a disagreeable conviction that something unpleasant had happened, stepped cautiously into the cell.

He continued to wave his lantern about, but its beams fell only on the dark and slimy walls.

Blueskin let the man advance until he got beyond the door.

Then, springing forward, he struck him a blow with the full force of his arm.

The turnkey dropped to the floor as if shot.

He never uttered a word.

The keys fell jingling from his grasp, and the lantern rolled into a distant corner.

Blueskin gave the door a kick and closed it.

His first act was to pick up the lantern.

The next, the keys.

Then, going up to the prostrate form, he proceeded to ascertain the extent of his injuries.

Whoever it might be, he lay very still.

A beam from the lantern fell upon his countenance.

Blueskin uttered an exclamation of amazement and delight.

The man who lay at his feet was no other than Mr. Noakes.

Yes, it was indeed the unfortunate Governor, who had come to pay Blueskin a last visit before retiring to rest.

He had just come from Jack Sheppard's cell, whom he left all safe.

Mr. Noakes was alone, and this happened to be a very fortunate circumstance for Blueskin.

The blow which Mr. Noakes had received had wholly deprived him of consciousness.

"Here is luck!" said Blueskin. "This is more than I hoped for and expected. I shall be free, and doubtless all the doors will open at my approach. I am revenged upon this rash, meddling fool. Now for the key of my fetters!"

Blueskin stooped down, and began to search the Governor's pockets.

He was not long in finding what he sought.

His hand trembled as he possessed himself of the little instrument which would enable him to get free from his fetters.

Putting the lantern down upon the ground, he set to work.

The locks yielded easily.

In a few moments he was quite free from his irons.

Mr. Noakes still lay perfectly motionless.

"Now, what shall be my next step?" asked Blueskin.

"I will take these keys and this lantern. The first will doubtless enable me to open all the doors that may intervene between me and Jack's cell, and the second will show me the way. But, in the meantime, how shall I dispose of the Governor?"

Blueskin considered a moment, and then he said:

"Bravo—I have it! I will try how he likes being made a portable ironmonger's shop of. I will put my fetters on him, and lock him up in the dungeon! Ha, ha!"

This plan so tickled Blueskin's fancy that he could not control his laughter.

He set to work, however, in good earnest to execute his intention, for he was well aware of the imprudence of wasting time.

Accordingly he clasped the fetters about the insensible Governor's limbs, and carefully secured them with the key.

When this was done, Blueskin took up the lantern and the bunch of keys.

For a short time he and the Governor had changed places.

Mr. Noakes, however, began to give signs of returning animation, and Blueskin favoured him with a kick to assist him in recovering himself.

"Wh—what has happened?" gasped the Governor.

"It's all right, old cock!" said Blueskin, with a chuckle. "How do you like your jewellery? We have changed places, old fellow. Now you are the prisoner, and I am the Governor. Good-bye to you!"

And before Mr. Noakes could recover himself, Blueskin left the cell.

He closed the door carefully after him, and locked it.

Then with a confident step he took his way along the corridor.

It was not long, however, before he found himself completely at fault.

"Which way ought I to take now, I wonder?" he asked himself.

But the question was a perfectly useless one.

It was quite clear that he had nothing but the merest chance to guide him.

In spite of this, however, as he had a large bunch of keys in his hand, he did not despair of being able to discover Jack's cell.

He unlocked a door in the corridor, and passing through it, ascended a long flight of stone steps immediately beyond.

At the top was another door, and through this he also made his way by the aid of the keys.

He now entered another corridor, at the extremity of which was another door.

Blueskin was a long time finding a key that would fit this lock, but at length he succeeded.

The door swung back upon its hinges.

No sooner, however, had he done so than he wished he had failed entering.

He attempted to close the door again, but he was too late.

In his ignorance of the interior arrangement of the prison, Blueskin had unconsciously made his way in a direct line to the turnkeys' room.

The door he had opened with so much difficulty led into it.

The turnkeys, some four or five in number, were sitting, in a half-sleeping state, upon the benches placed around the walls.

Their attention, however, had been attracted by the bungling manner in which Blueskin tried the keys; they all turned their eyes to the doorway, wondering who was about to enter.

Can the reader conceive their astonishment when the door, swinging back, disclosed the figure of Blueskin standing upon the threshold, with a lantern in one hand and a bunch of keys in the other?

A cry of rage and surprise burst from their lips, and, springing to their feet, they rushed after him.

Blueskin, stunned and bewildered by this mishap, felt it only natural to turn round and flee.

He did so.

The turnkeys followed at his heels like a pack of hounds.

The uproar was prodigious.

Away they went at headlong speed, and such an exciting race was surely never before run through the corridors of Newgate.

But the prisoner was not able to go far without meeting with a door.

In the prison, all doors are kept secured.

Blueskin tried to unlock this one.

From sheer desperation, he thrust the key into the lock.

It fitted.

He turned it round.

It yielded.

The door flew open.

But the delay which had of necessity taken place had enabled Blueskin's pursuers to come close up to him.

He felt one of the turnkeys touch him on the shoulder, but at the same moment he gave a bound forward, and got out of his reach.

On they came, however, with unabated speed, and then Blueskin found his progress barred by a second door.

He was now obliged to give up.

He could not hope to be so fortunate as to hit upon the right key twice running by mere chance alone.

However, he made the attempt.

But the key was too small.

He pulled it out and tried another.

This was too large.

He turned round with a curse, for his enemies were upon him.

They outnumbered him by far, and, hopeless as his position was, he determined not to yield without a desperate struggle.

He whirled the heavy bunch of keys round his head—for it was the only thing in the shape of a weapon that he had got—and struck some heavy blows.

But he was almost instantly surrounded and overpowered.

They seized his arms, and held them tightly.

He was powerless, and was at last compelled to succumb; but it was not until he perceived that he had done some execution on his foes.

A great outcry was now made for Mr. Noakes, but the Governor could not of course be found.

A suspicion as to what was the real state of affairs darted into a turnkey's mind, and he communicated his thoughts to his companions without delay.

He had seen the Governor on his way to Blueskin's cell, carrying a lantern and a bunch of keys.

Now, the prisoner had appeared with those articles.

They resolved, at all hazards, to make their way at once to cell No. 18.

They did so.

Ere they reached the door, however, a dull, muffled sound came upon their ears.

It grew louder as they approached.

The Governor was hammering away at the door in the most reckless manner imaginable.

At the same time, he cried:

"Let me out—let me out! D—n you all, I say! Let me out—let me out!"

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIX.

THE HOUR FIXED FOR THE EXECUTION OF BLUESKIN AT LENGTH ARRIVES.

ALTHOUGH the words the Governor spoke came very faintly on the ears of those outside, they were uttered at the very top of his voice.

It was the thickness of the cell door that deadened the sound.

The turnkeys for a moment or two did nothing but stare at each other.

They were perfectly aglast.

Despite the reaction which he could not help feeling at this frustration of his capital scheme, Blueskin was unable to forbear a smile of exultation when he thought of the astonishment the turnkeys would exhibit when they saw the state of the Governor.

"Let me out!" roared the Governor, who continued, without the least intermission, his attack upon the door.

"Let me out! Ten thousand curses!"

"My eye, Bill," said one of the turnkeys, "ain't he a going it?"

"Rather!" said Bill.

"Crikey! if this here ain't a lark, and no gammon; but the best thing we can do is to unlock the door, and let him out."

"And then won't he be like a rampageant lion?"

"I guess he will! However, here goes!"

With these words, the turnkey inserted the key in the lock.

There was a sharp click, and the door flew open. Then such a howl came upon the ears of the turnkeys that they started back in horror.

They could not believe that a human being had given utterance to it.

The dismal rattling and clanking of chains followed.

So great was the fright of the turnkeys at the inhuman sound, that they would probably have started off, had not the voice of the Governor recalled them to themselves.

They recognised the tones now.

"Come here, villains!—come here, I say! Come here and release me, or, damme, I will discharge you all!"

Terrified at this threat, which they doubted not Mr. Noakes would carry out, the trembling turnkeys rushed into the cell.

There, to their dismay and astonishment, they found the Governor with all Blueskin's fetters fastened upon him.

How long they would have stood by in gaping wonderment is hard to say, had not Mr. Noakes commanded them to set about releasing him.

Thus ordered, they obeyed, and in a few moments the Governor was free.

Never had that functionary been in such an infuriated state as he was at that moment.

He was perfectly beside himself with rage.

Uttering a snarling kind of howl, he sprang towards Blueskin, the perpetrator of this outrage.

He clenched his fist, and struck our old friend two blows in the face which quite staggered him.

"Take that!" said the Governor—"take that! The only consolation I have is, that you will be hanged in a day or two!"

Blueskin was ill prepared to defend himself from this or any other attack that might be made upon him.

His arms and hands were held securely by two turnkeys, so that he could neither ward off the blows nor return them.

He was completely at the Governor's mercy.

It was very cowardly of Mr. Noakes, but he was destined not to escape without receiving some punishment.

Finding he could not use his fists, Blueskin bethought himself of his feet.

He lifted up his foot, then, and dealt the Governor such a kick that he dropped down on the floor of the cell at once, and then rolled over and over, uttering sharp screams of pain.

"Take that yourself!" cried Blueskin. "In a general way, I don't approve of kicking, but then, how else is a man to defend himself from a coward who attacks him while his hands are held?"

The turnkeys could with difficulty conceal the pleasure which the Governor's discomfiture gave them.

No one liked him.

In Newgate he reigned supreme, and, as might be expected from such a man, he converted himself into a perfect tyrant.

At some time or other something had occurred to all those present which caused them to conceive a grudge against him, and consequently all felt delighted when this piece of retribution overtook him.

Nevertheless, having an eye to future consequences, they hypocritically sprang forward to his assistance, and, after a good deal of trouble, they managed to raise him to his feet.

The kick he had received was a very severe one, and Blueskin fully intended it should be.

"I hope you like it!" he said. "Perhaps it will be a lesson to you another time, my friend!"

"Curse you!" shrieked Mr. Noakes, "but I will be revenged for this! Load him with fetters, and then come to me for further instructions!"

At a signal to those who supported him, he was led from the cell to his own apartments in the prison.

All the way he went, he continued to utter such horrible curses that, used as the turnkeys were to that sort of thing, they could not help shuddering at their fearful character.

Mr. Noakes was considerably damaged.

He had far from recovered from the attack which Blueskin had made upon him in the dock, and then he had been knocked down on the floor of the cell, and, to crown all, he had had a kick that had materially disarranged his internal economy.

However, he was taken to his own apartments, and then he gave strict instructions that, in order to prevent all possibility of another escape taking place, two turnkeys were to sit continually in the cell along with the prisoner.

These turnkeys were to be relieved every two hours.

By adopting this measure, the Governor thought he should be able to make sure of him.

Under this conviction, he, with many groans, got into bed, and fell off into a profound slumber.

From this he was aroused by the dreadful tolling of the alarm-bell, for the reader must not forget to remember that the events we have just been describing took place on the night when Jack Sheppard made his escape.

In describing the events which followed the discovery of Jack's disappearance, we stated that while the turnkeys were pausing in wonder before the door of the chapel, they heard a dreadful sound, immediately after which the Governor made his appearance.

Having the key to all that had taken place, the reader will no longer wonder at the violent and extraordinary conduct of Mr. Noakes.

It now remains, in order to take up all the broken threads of our narrative, to relate what took place in Newgate after the despatchment of the officers after Jack, up to the moment when Jack Sheppard performed the unheard-of feat of cutting down the gallows at Tyburn.

The Governor's instructions as to two turnkeys being left in the cell along with Blueskin were fully carried out.

It was not at all a bad idea that, and it is one which is found to work very well at the present day, when all prisoners are kept under continual surveillance.

The plan is found to be far more efficient than trusting to stone walls, bolts, bars, and fetters.

When the two men came and sat down in the cell with him, Blueskin at once gave up all hope of ever making his escape.

He was convinced that it was impossible for him to succeed.

The only chance he had was, that he might be able to win the turnkeys over to his interests, but that hope was so frail a one as to afford no support whatever.

He was also quite unable to get over his disappointment.

It was doubly aggravating to think that he should have got out of his cell so cleverly and easily as he did, and then to be recaptured through his own incaution.

He folded his arms and leant back on his seat in sullen silence.

In this manner the remainder of the night was passed until in the morning Blueskin and his two companions were startled by the ominous clanging of the alarm-bell.

All three were amazed.

"An escape, after all, by jingo!" cried one of the turnkeys.

"I wonder who on earth it can be?"

"I'll be shot if I know!"

"I'll lay two to one it's Jack Sheppard, if it's anyone!"

"So would I!"

A pause of anxious expectation now ensued.

The turnkeys could tell an unusual commotion was going on in the prison, and they wished they could go and see what had happened.

Duty, however, compelled them to remain where they were.

After a time the excitement seemed to subside.

Blueskin's curiosity was greatly aroused, and during the day he managed—though in a fragmentary fashion—to obtain an account of Jack's escape.

He felt thankful that his comrade had succeeded in getting off, and his spirits rose again, for now that Jack was at liberty, he knew all that could be done towards effecting his escape would be done.

He was told, however, that Jack Sheppard had, by the order of Mr. Noakes and Jonathan Wild, been kept in entire ignorance of the fact that he (Blueskin) was a prisoner in Newgate as well as himself.

"That accounts for all, then!" muttered Blueskin. "I thought it was rather strange he made no effort to make me the companion of his flight; but now all is explained. He will not be at liberty very long before he learns where I am."

After making this reflection, Blueskin became more content.

